When Pan Pipes

by

MARY TAYLOR THORNTON

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Mary Taylor Thornton

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A Fantastic Romance

By

MARY TAYLOR THORNTON

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To My Dear Ones,
Here and Elsewhere

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Part One: Cloudesley

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CHAPTER I

JEREMY GOES TO FAIRYLAND

JEREMY lay quietly. The white counterpane moved up and down with each long-drawn breath, the white dimity curtains fluttered drowsily as the gentle summer breeze stole in. From outside came scents and sounds telling of flowers and fields, of farmyards and stables. Presently the dying man raised himself; his gaze wandered longingly through the little casement window to meadows and woods stretching far away to the distant horizon, where, caught in the sun's burning embrace, they mingled and were lost in a haze of heat. The wistful look rested for a time on the beautiful scene, then wandered idly back, back to the small room, to the medley of canvases and easels, of plaster casts, clay images, finished and unfinished, brushes, modelling tools, and all the paraphernalia of an artist's studio. Yet, in them there was something different from the ordinary workshop. The canvases packed closely together, the folded easel, the tidy arrangement of odds and ends, told their own tale. Never again would their owner disarrange them, and Jeremy sighed as his gaze travelled on. This time it rested lovingly on a group of figures carved in purest white marble.

It represented Pan, seated on a bank of deep bracken, piping to fairies and goblins who danced around him. The

god, with his goat legs crossed and his long ears pricked, wore the usual cruel, satyr-like expression, but with it went a look, half merry, half wistful and wholly gentle. It would have been a puzzle to anyone to say which predominated. The artist himself was wont to declare that it depended upon the mood of the observer, and that only he himself saw both sides.

In the noontide glare, the figures stood out life-like, yet only as figures carved in stone. But there were times when the winter firelight played on them, or the harvest moon peeped in at the window and turned the marble to a purer whiteness, and Jeremy saw them come to life, these creatures of his imagining, when Pan's pipe played a mystical merry air, when the mossy banks sent out a perfume of meadow-sweet and new mown hay, when the forget-me-nots by the enchanted pool glowed deeply blue, when fairies tripped lightly, and fauns and satyrs stepped clumsily round, keeping time to the magic music and beckoning the sick man to come out to the moonlit glade, where Nature held high revels.

But no more would they call—never again—and Jeremy turned his head away with a sigh. His eyes rested on a small, solemn-faced boy sitting on the bed, very busily engaged with a piece of clay, twisting and turning it with fat dimpled fingers, and wholly absorbed in his task. Jeremy's hand stroked a chubby leg lovingly.

"What are you doing, Jerry boy?"

Without looking up the small one answered, "Making a horse, daddy."

Jeremy smiled, then sighed again, and thoughtfully gazed at the long thin fingers, contrasting in their whiteness with the brown, firm skin they touched. Presently he spoke again.

"Jerry boy, when I've gone away, will you try and remember me? Will you try to think what I looked like, how I spoke, and all that I said to you? And will you remember how I loved you? Ah, Jerry boy, how I loved you! Will you try, sonnie? Promise me."

The child paused in his work, lifted serious brown eyes and nodded gravely.

"I promise, daddy." Then, as though struck by a sudden thought, "Are you going away, daddy?"

"Yes, Jerry."

The scarlet lips drooped piteously; into the round brown eyes came presently a mistiness, changing, as the sense of the words fully dawned, to big tears. Slowly they welled up, brimmed over and fell. Dropping the piece of sticky clay, Jerry crept close.

"Daddy, daddy, don't go, don't leave Jerry."

The encircling arms drew him closer—closer.

"Jerry, old man, don't cry. Daddy must go; but you'll have Margery, you know. You love Margie."

"Don't want Margie—I want my daddy."

"Oh, Jerry boy, it's hard, so hard. But you must be good. Jerry, be good always. Never forget; and sometime—sometime—you'll come and find me."

"Shall I?" The brown eyes, so full of trouble, brightened a little. "Where's you going, daddy?"

Jeremy smiled and kissed the broad, white forehead.

"Jerry, I'm going to tell you something; try to remember what daddy tells you. Once, Jerry, long ago, ah, so long ago it seems to me, before you came at all, I was ill and tired, Jerry, and so miserable. Everything went wrong. I had no little boy to love or to love me, and I was very lonely. Then, do you know, Jerry, suddenly I turned a corner, and—what do you think I found?"

"A fairy," answered Jerry promptly.

"Yes, a fairy, all in white. And she smiled at me, and at once everything seemed right. There was the beautiful warm sun shining, and the sky was so blue, and a little lark went singing, singing, away and away. Then the fairy took my hand, Jerry, and I felt so strong, I could do just anything in the world. So I asked the fairy if she would stay with me and help me always."

"And did she?" asked Jerry eagerly.

Jeremy nodded. "Yes. She came with me and lived with me, and gave me everything I wanted. Jerry, she gave me—what do you think?"

"I dunno." The voice was tense with interest.

"Well, one day she gave me a little warm bundle, all wrapped in a shawl, and when I opened the shawl and peeped in it was —you."

"Was it?"

"Yes. And then, Jerry, very soon after, the fairy told me that she had to leave me, just as I'm telling you that I must go. She said they had only lent her for a little while. But I knew that they couldn't spare her any longer, for, Jerry, she was the loveliest fairy that ever came out of fairyland, and she loved me so very much—and just as she loved me, she loved you. And so, she went away. Yet soon," the voice died almost to a whisper, "soon I shall see her, my dearest, my dearest—very soon now."

Jerry raised his head; a new thought had struck him.

"Daddy, are you going to find the fairy?"

"Yes, Jerry."

"Are you going to fairyland?"

Jeremy paused. His glance wandered from the child to the figure of the god.

"What's in a name?" he murmured. "Heaven, Walhalla, fairyland—it's all the same. Yes, sonnie," he turned again, "I'm going to fairyland, and I shall find the fairy, never fear. Wherever she is, wherever I go—I shall find her."

Jerry nodded, then cuddled down again.

"Will you bring the fairy to see me, daddy?"

"No, Jerry. They won't let us out of fairyland, once they get us."

"Won't they?"

The tears began to gather afresh, and Jeremy hastened to repair the error.

"But, Jerry, though you can't see the fairy, though they

won't let her come through the curtain which hangs between us and fairyland, she's always near, always looking after us. And when I go through the curtain, I, too, shall always be near you, so near that sometimes you'll hear my voice. And some day, Jerry, when you are a big, grown-up man, if you are good, and always try to help people, you'll turn a corner, and you'll find a fairy, I hope, all in white, with a little hand stretched out to take yours. But you must be sure it's the right fairy, because there are lots of imitation fairies in the world."

"Are there, daddy?"

"Yes, Jerry. And I'll tell you one thing to know her by; her name must begin with an M. All good fairies' names begin with an M. There's Mollie and Meg; they're gay, laughing fairies, who'll lead you through a world of mirth. Then there's Martha and Matilda; they're brownie fairies, who sew, and cook, and make the world a home. Margaret and Maud are tall and queenly, and—I'll whisper it, Jerry—sometimes we're just a little wee bit afraid of them. But," the laughing voice grew soft, "there's one name; the best of all, and it belongs to a fairy—ah, Jerry, such a fairy. I can't describe her; she is beautiful, though, maybe, not as the world sees beauty. She is gentle, pure, loving; gay when you are gay, sad when you are sad, yet with a sadness which comforts. She is quiet, like a little soft mouse, yet never dull. Busy, like a little brown bee, yet always ready to listen. Her voice, like a little singing cricket's, tells of home and bright fires and warm comforts. Her tiny feet, like a bird's, run up and down, here and there, for everyone. Her pretty hands, not always white, flash like a swallow's wing as they do their work. And she's soft and warm, Jerry, like a little kitten, and her eyes are deep, dark pools, and her lips are like crimson berries, and her name is the most beautiful name in the world, for it means all that is holy, all that is divine. It is—Mary."

"Oh—" the voice was slightly mystified. Jeremy had flown

higher than the child could follow, though he grasped the main idea.

"Daddy—" after a short pause, "what do witches' names begin with?"

Jerry laughed. If he had not bargained for the question, he was ready.

"H., Jerry, H. Helle, Hecate—Hebe, Helen; though they were witches of another sort. You'll know some day."

Jerry sat quite still, thinking it over. Jeremy watched him lovingly. Presently the eyelids drooped; the child crept closer, burrowing a warm dark head among the pillows.

"I'm tired, daddy."

Jeremy drew him near, looking down with a tender, wistful smile at the drowsy brown eyes, and the curling eyelashes lying against a soft brown cheek. In a few minutes there was silence, only broken by the sick man's heavy breathing, and the low, gentle murmur of a sleeping child.

The drowsy summer morning droned on. Shadows of trees grew short and shorter; birds twittered idly; a cock crowed a lazy crow in the distance. From far off came the sound of scythes, the hum of workers. Monthly roses on the walls pushed their inquisitive pink faces round the window, the breath of summer crept in, stirring Jerry's dark curls, moist with heat, bringing to Jeremy memories of bygone days, of happy hours when Pan piped and fairies danced; when all the world was young and gay, and life was sometimes a dragon to be conquered, sometimes a syren to be wooed, sometimes a mocking, laughing nymph, who beckoned and gave chase, yet was always just a little ahead. And Pan kept his goat legs hidden in deep grasses and mossy banks, while fauns and satyrs lurked unseen behind trees, and over all hung enchantment like a hazy, golden mist; the enchantment, the magic of youth.

There was a little stir on the flagged path below. Girlish voices, hushed because of the sick man above, made a soft sound, broken ever and anon by a ripple of uncontrollable

laughter. And again Jeremy smiled. Long ago, before Art called him, he, too, had worked beneath the dear summer sun, had listened to the melodious song of the scythes as they swung to and fro, flashing silver in the fierce light which drank up all color, turning things to shadowy white and brown. How he had listened for the church clock striking, the laughing voices of maids in fresh print frocks and sunbonnets, who brought the "elevenses"—mugs of home brewed ale, cakes of spicy, curranty bread new baked. How it came back—the glory of work, the joy of life; and as the voices receded in the distance, the drone of summer again fell unbroken.

The maids returned; Jeremy's thoughts grew longer, further apart. Jerry's gentler breathing mingled with them. Fairies, flowers, art, nature, jumbled and jostled each other in a confused medley, then the door handle turned softly.

Slowly, very slowly, the door opened, and a little woman peeped round it—a little, smiling, round-faced, apple-cheeked woman, dressed in brown linsey, with a white fichu and mob cap, and hands wrinkled and gnarled with work, yet with a look in them that made you long to take them in yours, and kiss the dear fingers which had worked for everyone all their days. She tip-toed across the snow-white boards, across the tiny square of carpet, and leaned over the bed; then, with a beaming nod of approval, tip-toed back, and drawing a chair to the window, sat down to work. Now to Nature's drowsy sounds was added another—the sound of human work. Click—click—went the busy needles. One—two—purl and plain—the smiling lips moved as they counted. Yet, now and then, she would lay down her needles and glance towards the bed. Then the smile would vanish—at least, as far as it was possible for a smile to vanish from such a face—and the lips, instead of counting, would sigh.

Once or twice she tip-toed to the bedside, and shook her head doubtfully as she settled to work again. Click—click—one-two—purl-plain-increase-decrease—turn and change the shining needles. The little white sock was growing. Church

Clock, watching over the busy workers in the fields, the quiet sleepers in their green beds below, struck noon.

The workers stirred—the sleepers slept on. Not yet would they awaken. Busy housewives fetched down shining steel-pronged forks and horn-handled knives, and drew settles closer. In the red-tiled, oak-panelled kitchens the wenches lowered huge cranes, and served steaming bacon and sweet green peas into platters set on the long wooden tables. All was cheerful bustle and orderly confusion; brawny, weather-beaten, sun-dried men trooped in; the lassies fetched ale and supplied their wants, then drew a breath of relief, for the sun stood at its zenith; its beams fell almost straight, and with noon and the mid-day dinner the height of the working day was reached.

Jeremy opened his eyes, and the little apple-cheeked woman, ever on the watch, nodded mysteriously, pursed her lips, and went out of the room. Presently she returned, bearing a cup of steaming beef tea. Jeremy softly drew his arm away, and turned the sleeping child from him.

"Needn't be afraid, master—he won't wake yet awhiles. Sit up and eat something." The voice was gentle and soft, with a marked suggestion of Scottish birth, shown more in the inflexion and burr than in the words themselves. In moments of agitation it became more noticeable, broadening out at times to a decided accent.

She propped him with pillows, and putting the basin before him, watched him eat with anxious concern. Then, seeing him well launched, she trotted back to her chair. Presently she glanced up and caught his eye. He was looking at her with a comical expression of fear.

"Margie, I'm so sorry. I can't manage it."

The smiling lips fell; the tiny feet trotted across the room again. She peered into the basin and her face fell lower.

"Oh, master, you haven't touched it hardly, and I made it all myself. Mrs. Chubbe scolded, but I thought I'd make it

just this once. Come, Master Jeremy, try again." She lifted the spoon to his lips, feeding him like a baby, but after the second mouthful, placed the cup on a table with a sigh, and, moving the pillows, let him lie back.

"So sorry, Margie. And it was such good beef tea, too. Never mind, I shan't trouble you much longer."

She was busy with the basin, and made no answer, but he saw her lift her skirt, draw out a handkerchief from the petticoat pocket, and with her back to him, lift it to her eyes.

"Sit down, Margie," he said presently, "I won't vex you again. I want to talk to you. To make sure I've left everything right. Ah"—he was musing again—"I ought to be content; I've had happiness such as few men have. I've worked, I've lived, I've loved. Not enough of each to feel satiation, but enough to know the beauty of life. And yet—yet—but for going to seek her, I'd like to live on, to see her child grow up; to teach him to work, to live, to love, to watch Nature as I've watched her, to see sun settings and sun risings; the procession of the year; blue skies for joy, grey skies for peace, black skies for storm. Seas, rivers, countryside, moorland—to see and love them all, as I have seen and loved them. Well, I must be content to die peacefully, with all I love around me—Jerry, you, Margery, my work, and the glorious summer. And somewhere, not far off, just behind the curtain which hangs between us and fairyland, she's waiting—so near—so near—I can almost feel her hand."

He paused—then, with a quick glance at the little figure by the window, came back to earth. "Margie—"

She turned, no longer attempting to hide the tears which fell thick and fast as she leaned over him.

"Margie—" his voice was low and sweet, "don't fret for me. Think, if I find her, behind the curtain. Dry your tears, nursie, and listen." She smoothed the damp hair back with those tender loving fingers, and Jeremy went on.

"Margery, you'll come back, won't you?"

"Yes, master, I'll come back just as soon as ever I can. I'll see them settled, and then I'll take the next boat back; I'll be back in a year—an' that'll soon pass."

"And in the meantime, Margie," the voice grew practical, "who is it to be—Mrs. Chubbe?"

She shook her head.

"Sir, don't let him go to her; she's hard—an' she's got a scolding tongue. That little Betty, I hear her screaming sometimes, she speaks that sharp to her."

"Betty's a naughty child, you know, Margie."

"She's high spirited, sir, an' mischievous, but I shouldn't like to hear—" she broke off, with an explicit nod of the head. "No, Master Jeremy, let Widow Hagges take him. She's kind an' she's religious—though not, 'tis true, of the true faith. But he'll be well looked after."

"Well, then, so be it," he answered, after a minute's hesitation. "You know the people better than I do. And you quite understand about the money, Margery. There's a thousand pounds. Gardiner and Gardiner will see that three pounds are paid every month to Mrs. Hagges. When you come back, you'll have him, you know. You can manage, Margie, on fifty pounds a year, can't you?" he added anxiously.

"Manage, sir, an' I live in luxury. I only wish my young sister had chosen a working man in England, 'stead of going trapesing into them wilds, with Indians, and scalps, and you don't know what. It'll be a glad day when I get back, though I couldn't leave my little girl, who's only had me to look to."

"Of course you couldn't, Margie," he sighed gently. "Ah, if there had only been someone else besides." For answer the little woman flung herself on her knees beside the bed.

"Ah, Master Jeremy, for the last time I beg of you—let me take him to Ardelimar. He'll be in safe keeping—an' he'll be loved so dearly. For his ain sake, and for the sake o' the wee bairn who was loved sae mony years ago. Ah, master, dinna say me nay."

"No, Margie—" the gentle lips closed firmly. "I'll not have my boy taught to hate—to despise her. Nor shall he be taught that wealth and position are worth more than honest hard work. But one day, when he has made himself a man, then take him to Ardelimar, and show him the old home; for, after all, it is his inheritance. Margie—" he was away in the past, "do you remember the old garden? My lady's garden we used to call it. The gilliflowers and forget-me-nots in the spring, the roses and lilies in the summer-time, and the long apple walk where the ground is thickly white with fallen blooms. Do you remember the arch which I built, and the sun-dial on the house, and the peace of it all—oh, the wondrous peace, the peace of heaven. And I shall never see it again in this life. After—who knows?"

There was a silence, broken only by a catch in the old woman's breath. Presently he spoke again.

"Margie, when—afterwards, you know—there'll be those things," he gave a comprehensive wave towards the casts and pieces of sculpture. "Send them to Gallagher. He'll know what to do with them. He's an old friend, and though a bit of a rascal, he'll treat you fairly, for my sake. But remember, Margie, they're not to be sold unless Jerry really wants the money, whatever Gallagher may say. A man's not celebrated till he's dead, and the longer he's dead, the better for his work, that is, if he's a genius—and I'm that. Yes, if I could only have had a few more years, I'd have made my name ring through Christendom. Ah me—*Ars longa, vita brevis est.* Never were truer words." Another pause, and again the eager voice, weaker now, went on. "Above all, Margie—the Pan isn't to be sold till Jerry's twenty. Gallagher knows; he's got all instructions. But jog his memory, when the time comes. You know which I mean—the one you don't like. Margery," he spoke curiously, "why *don't* you like it? It's my best, far and away."

He waited for the answer; the woman paused, unable to find words of explanation.

"I don't know, Master Jerry, not exactly why. There's a something in the creature's face for all his gentle kind look —a something—" she hesitated. "Something cruel-like—sort of obstinate." He raised himself, almost triumphantly.

"Did you see it, Margery, did you? Then I've got what I wanted, the 'sweep away all obstacles—never mind the means for the end.' That's what I wanted, that's Nature. Stern, relentless, inexorable. That's why there's sorrow and trouble, Margie, which will all come right in the end."

"Aye, Master Jerry, I know that. Our Lady an' the Blessed Saints will see to it." He made an impatient gesture.

"No, no, Margery, they're only part of the means. There's something more, greater, nobler, more glorious even than those. Death's nothing—only a change in the great scheme. Sun, moon, stars, our little world—all nothing—nothing alone, yet part of the whole. Life—that's more—for it's a common gift for all to use."

Margery shook her head doubtfully. She was used to these flights of fancy, to her they were mere words. The light treatment of the saints grated on her, but she had long ago given up argument. She put him back like a little child, drawing the coverings over him, and bidding him sleep. But Jeremy had more to say.

"Margery," and the voice was very weak now, each word was an effort; "tell him to be strong, to help the weak, to be chivalrous to all women—for her sake; to be a staunch friend, a true gentleman, and above all, a man. Teach him that, Margie, will you?"

She kissed the long thin fingers—the fingers of the idealist, the artist. "I will, Master Jeremy—so help me, God." Jeremy lay back contentedly.

"That's good," he said, and Church Clock struck one.

Jerry stirred, roused, rubbed his eyes with chubby knuckles, and lay drowsily staring at the dancing flies on the ceiling. Margery trotted round.

"Come along, Master Jerry. Come and see Betty, and

have your dinner. You've had a nice long sleep, and it's getting late."

Jerry waved a chubby fist, and Jeremy from the bed-clothes responded in like manner. Then, as the door shut, he closed his eyes wearily. He was very, very tired.

Church Clock struck two and three. Margie stole in; her needles sang their song of industry. The sun sank from its height; shadows grew longer. Church Clock struck four, and old Anthony, the sexton, rang the gleaners' bell. Down the village street they trooped, mothers looking forward to the bin of flour gathered and stored for the winter; children, with joyous thoughts of unchecked wanderings over stubbly fields, and possible small adventures. Maidens hurried to glean where their lovers worked, and with them came damsels from the farms around, bearing cans of ale and cakes, called this time "fourses."

The sun sank behind the busy fields, flooding all with a crimson glory; high up, Church Clock peeped into odd corners, and saw all sorts of things; so he moved his hands very slowly, and time lagged behind, loath to let the pretty scene slip into the past.

Regretfully, lingeringly, Church Clock struck five. Margery tip-toed across the room, gave one look at the peaceful sleeping face, then flung up her arms with a sobbing cry.

"Oh, master, master—I hadna thocht 'twould be sae sune."

A little hand had lifted the shadowy, misty curtain which hangs between us and fairyland, and grasping Jeremy's in its cool gentle clasp, had drawn him in. The curtain fell—the quiet face wore a look of radiant happiness, for he had found the beautiful Fairy.

CHAPTER II

THE WITCH'S COTTAGE

THE big farm kitchen was cleared for the afternoon. Red tiles, newly "slurried," blushed rosily; bright dish covers, copper kettles, the brass "kitty" by the fireside, the copper warming-pan on the wall, grinned cheerily. Great beams, hung with hams and sides of bacon, wore a solemn expression, as though conscious of their own dignity. The diamond-paned casements were merely graceful and decorative, and the chimney corner, with its pewter spittoons, well worn cushions, churchwarden pipes, and bowl of paper spills, spoke of comfort earned after labour. A fire, despite the heat, burned in the huge grate. Over it hung the crane, now bearing a monster kettle, a kettle which sang merrily a song of the fragrant leaf, of cream and home-made bread, of cheese and rusks, of honey and new baked cakes, of pink and white ham, of raspberry pies, and all the good things of a farmhouse tea. And over all hung that peculiar odour, a mixture of roses, hot bread, damp bricks, hams, and summer heat.

On a settle sat Jerry, and beside him, brown linsey frock turned up, knelt Margery, endeavouring to squeeze a fat foot into a somewhat tight shoe. Over the edge of a clean starched pinny Jerry watched the process with solemn brown eyes. Others were watching. Where time moves slowly, small things are of great account. Sally, the kitchen wench, leaned on her broom with a broad smile on her equally broad face, a face which, when scoured for the afternoon with yellow soap and much vigour, bore a striking resemblance to the warming-pan.

At the end of the settle hung a small child, impish, elfish, pixie like; a mouth, with scarlet lips, reached half across

her face; two eyes, dark almost to blackness, sparkled and gleamed like gems. A freckled nose turned up from a freckled, clearly pale face, giving it a roguish expression, and over the small dainty head clustered curls of a deep, reddish brown, which curls, instead of hanging in long graceful spirals, were short and uneven. Two days ago, they had been all that the heart of a mother could desire, but Miss Betty preferred coolness, and in the privacy of the orchard, with stolen scissors and only Jerry for witness, had sheared the unnecessary adornment to suit her own convenience.

She was dressed in a short-waisted pink frock, from beneath which emerged legs clad in pantaloons, and terminating in white socks and tiny feet cased in sandals. She was utterly absorbed in watching the performance, but the restless brown fingers busily snapped the elastic which held the shoes. Mrs. Chubbe broke the silence.

"Them shoes's too tight, mistress; best get another pair." A sharp snap from behind caused her to look round suddenly. "Stop pulling your elastic, Betty, naughty gal."

The child looked up, shot a daring glance at the faces round, and defiantly snapped the elastic again. Mrs. Chubbe stretched out a long arm. "There then—take that." A stinging slap on the brown knuckles sent the blood rushing scarlet to the tiny face. The black eyes gleamed fiercely, the red lips shut firmly. For a moment Betty looked down at her fingers, put them into her mouth for comfort, then deliberately tweaked the elastic again, quietly, half frightened at her own audacity.

"There—if you ever saw the likes of that? Take your fingers off, miss, or to bed you go."

Betty glanced through the casement, then at Jerry, weighing the pros and cons. Bed on a hot August afternoon, with bread and water for tea, was unpleasant, but to give in was worse. She gave the elastic a sounding thwack—as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. Mrs. Chubbe pounced upon her.

"You naughty, disobedient gal. What will become of you when you die? To bed you go, this very minute."

But Betty had no intention of going martyr-like to the stake. With the ease of long habit she stiffened every muscle in her little body, at the same time emitting a continuous scream, which caused Margery to stop her ears, and sit back on her heels.

"Lord-a-mussey!" she ejaculated, and Jerry's brown eyes filled with amazement.

"Yes, Mistress Marvin, now you see what she is, a naughty, disobedient child as ever I see. I've kept her quiet, let her have her own way, for fear of disturbing the poor gentleman. But now there's no need, and, well, you can see for yourself. Now, Miss—"

Mrs. Chubbe stooped over the rigid form, and with long lean arms lifted her bodily. The naughty legs relaxed, for purposes of their own; the tiny fingers nipped and pinched till they were pinioned in a firm grasp. Kicking, struggling, she was carried away, two frilly legs dangling busily under Mrs. Chubbe's arm, the brown curly head hanging low in front. At the door came an interlude; a loud cry from the captor, a final, but unsuccessful attempt for freedom from the victim, followed by the sound of a stinging slap.

"You bad, wicked gal. Biting! Fie, for shame on you."

The footsteps receded up the wooden staircase; there was silence in the kitchen, only broken by Margery's "Well, I never," and a giggle from Sally as she slipped away.

Mrs. Chubbe returned, triumphantly victorious, tying a rag round the wounded finger.

"Such a piece I never did see," she said; "but we'll see who'll be master. Spare the rod and spoil the child, say I, an' she's got a slipperin' to-day that'll cool her down for a time. The saucy puss!" A grim smile stole over the hard features. "For the life of me I can't help loving the child, though she's no kith nor kin of mine."

Margery Marvin looked up in surprise. "No kith nor kin?"

The landlady shook her head.

"No, though how't slipped out, I can't say. Like as not

'twas meant to be told, and 'tis a relief to be sure. You're going away, an' you're a trusty sort o' body, an' somehow I feel 'twould be a comfort to tell what no one but me'n my husband know." Margery, her eyes fixed on the speaker's face, listened, slightly wondering at the trust reposed in her. Mrs. Chubbe, dropping her voice, spoke rapidly.

"Seven years ago, one cruel cold winter night, snowin', an' the ice on the horse pond three inches thick, an' icicles hangin' a foot long from the eaves, there came a little whinin' cry. 'What's that, master?' says I, for my hearin's good. 'What's what?' says he. 'You're always hearin' summat, missis—ghosts an' sperrits, an' such like.' 'That's no ghost,' says I, whereupon it came again—sich a little pitiful cry, Matthew, he hears it that time, an' we went together to the back'us door. An' there, if you believe me, was a baby wrapped in blankets, an' tied round wi' a broad red sash, so soft an' silky you could have drawn it through my weddin' ring. We took it in an' gave it milk. 'Now what's to be done?' says I. 'Well, there's only one thing,' says Matthew, 'send it to Channington work'us to-morrow. It's market day, an' I'll take it along in the cart.' I just gave him a look. 'That you won't,' says I, 'when you know that for eight years we've been longin' for a child of our own. We'll keep it—an' that settles it.' 'Just as you like, missis,' says he, an' I mind me now he gave a chuckle. Since then he's told me he only said it o' purpose, knowin' I was given to contrariness, an' wantin' the child as much as ever as I did. An' so we've kept her—folk think she's my sister's child—an' here she is, as big a handful as a family. An' now, Mrs. Marvin, about them shoes. That child's 'Patience on a monument' an' no mistake. They're too tight, I tell you."

"I don't like to put on his old ones to go in," answered the nurse, "they're shabby. Try again, Master Jerry." A good push, a slap on the sole, and the wilful foot was in.

"That's right," cried Margie. "An' now I'll put on my bonnet, an' we'll go."

She lifted the child to his feet and crossed the room. Jerry followed slowly. What with running wild in meadows, dabbling in brooks, and being used as assistants when climbing trees, his feet were swollen much beyond best shoes. He struck out bravely, however, with only an occasional flinch. But the vision of the long walk down the lane to the Widow Hagges' cottage rose up, and involuntarily a little sigh escaped. Mrs. Chubbe, still watching, turned sharply.

"Mrs. Marvin, I'd be ashamed of myself, lettin' that child walk in them shoes. Two sizes too small they be."

Margery turned, saw the wistful beseeching look on the small face, and, with a cry, caught him up, hugging, kissing and self-reproaching. "Did they hurt—the nasty shoes! An' Margie's a cruel nurse."

"Best take them off, mistress," said Mrs. Chubbe drily. She obeyed, and Jerry breathed a deep sigh of relief.

"They didn't hurt, Margie; at least, not so very much, but I like the old ones best."

"An' he shall have them too. Nasty tight things, we'll burn them."

"No—don't do that," said the farmer's wife, "there's many a child 'ud be glad enough of them." Margery nodded and rose. Jerry trotted over to Mrs. Chubbe and touched her hand.

"Mrs. Chubbe—may I go and say good-bye to Betty? I'm sure she's good now."

She looked down and smiled at the earnest face. "Yes, child, go, an' you may tell Betty, if she's good, she may get up for tea."

Jerry's face brightened, even sparkled, as he scudded across the kitchen and climbed the wooden stairs outside.

Margery reached for her neat brown bonnet and tippet, a doubtful expression on her smiling face.

"Mrs. Chubbe," she began, in a hesitating tone, "I'm thinkin' —perhaps—I've done you an injustice. You see, there's been little time to do aught but cook an' nurse, an' so on—an' some-

how, it seems to me, p'raps we haven't got to know each other —not rightly. I thought you were hard on the child." Margery stroked the linsey gown absently. "You mustn't mind me sayin' it—but—I thought you'd a sharp tongue—an' the widow spoke fair—an'—an'—she's got religion, yet, somehow, now, I wish I was leavin' him with you." Mrs. Chubbe's face, darkening at the beginning of Margery's speech, cleared.

"Well," said she, "that's straight spoken. As to my tongue, I own 'tis sharp, but when you come to have charge of a house an' dairy, to say nothing o' the poultry an' pigs, which are enough to turn a body's hair grey, an' a pack o' idle gigglin' hussies always runnin' after the men—an' Lord knows, they're little better—besides a husband, an' a mischievous piece like that," she gave an expressive jerk upwards, "well, then, Mistress Marvin, you'll know that a soft tongue an' gentle ways ar'n't no manner o' use. But I'd like to ha' had the child," she added thoughtfully. "He'd have had to fare like our Betty, whippin's an' all," with a grim smile; "not that he's a child to want much o' that, though I think he's got a mind o' his own, an' likely he'd ha' done her good. Yes, I'm sorry, but I'll keep him in mind, Mistress Marvin, an' if I didn't, I know someone who will, an' that's Betty."

The dot-and-go-one footsteps were coming downstairs. Margery picked up her tippet and turned.

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Chubbe. I meant no harm, an' you've taken it as 'twas meant. 'Tis too late to alter now. I've given my word, an', after all, 'tisn't for long. You'll give him an eye, won't you?"

"That I will," answered the farmer's wife reassuringly.

"Then we'll be going. Come, Master Jerry, say good-bye."

The child lifted his face, and Mrs. Chubbe gave him a sounding kiss. "Good-bye, child, an' if Mrs. Hagges'll spare you, you're to come up on Sunday for the day."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Chubbe," said Jerry, gravely slipping his hand into Margery's. "An' please, Betty's good now, an' she's coming down to tea."

Mrs. Chubbe accompanied them to the door, then across the stackyard to the stile. Lifting Jerry over, she stood shading her eyes from the afternoon sun and watched the two figures cross the meadow and disappear into the lane—a lane, deep between high hedges, thick with dog roses and wild honeysuckle, bordered by ditches where grass grew rankly green, wild parsley, stinging nettles white with bloom, meadow-sweet and wild garlic. Overhead, trees met, whispered to each other secrets, here and there intertwining branches and defying the sun's rays to penetrate, while beneath, huge brown roots poked through the beaten track, in some places high enough to form a seat.

But it was not all shadow. As the lane twisted and turned, even winding back on itself at times, there were patches of sunlight, spaces flecked with shadows which danced themselves into patterns, now widening, now narrowing, changing like the patterns on a kaleidoscope as each breath of summer rustled among the leaves above.

Jerry trotted along—the shoes were comfortable—his hand in Margery's, and a thoughtful look on his solemn face. In a vague sort of way he recalled dimly the former settings of his little life. There was a glorious recollection of a place called the studio, where daddy, in a long white coat, mixed clay and chipped marble, and told him wonderful tales. Tales of Knights and Castles, of Ogres and Witches, Imps and Fairies—also others, equally wonderful, of a baby in the bulrushes, a man who was put into a den of lions, and another little child who was born in a manger.

Then the studio vanished, and a happy playground, called the seaside, took its place. Cliffs, beach, sparkling water, jumbled and jostled against the fairy tales. There were long walks on hard wet sand; over windswept downs, where the grass was short and slippery, and black-faced sheep nibbled and stared at you, but scampered off on near approach. Then the walks changed to days on the rocks, equally delightful.

Daddy was too tired to do much, even to talk, and Jerry

had to find his own amusements—not a difficult thing for a small boy, given rocks, star-fish, shrimps, and sea urchins. The summer days faded; the sea, instead of being blue and friendly, suddenly became something to be feared. Its gentle, lapping waves, changed to high mountains of grey-brown water, falling in angry thunder on the beach, then receding with a sound of dragging reluctant stones, only to gather again. The sea was a wild and fearsome thing then, and daddy hated it as much as Jerry. He said it was Pan showing his goat legs—whatever that might mean. They had fled from it, and in warm, crowded London, found escape from the cruel, dreary winter of seaside and country.

The flutter of Spring's wings roused them again. In the old farmhouse inn, Jerry discovered a new world—a world of chickens, pigs, and friendly animals, of stackyards and stables, of fields and birds' nests, and the mysteries of eggs. But Jerry's little heart was lonely, for daddy no longer shared his discoveries. The change from easy chair to bed, from late rising and early retiring to complete rest, had been so gradual that the child hardly noticed it. The final break came like a bolt from the blue. At one fell swoop the roots of his small life were rudely torn up. Daddy gone, Margie going—stunned and bewildered, Jerry's brain failed to grasp the situation in its reality, and he accepted things with a callousness not due to want of feeling, rather because death and loss were as yet unknown factors in his world. The day was not far off when he was to realize his loss with a poignant keenness.

He knew that he was going to live with the Widow Hagges till Margery came back; his thoughts travelled no further. It was a sober little figure that trotted down the twisting lane; only when it turned for the last time, and the cottage appeared, did his grasp tighten. Margery looked down tenderly, and Jerry returned a wistful smile.

"You'll be a good boy, my dearie, won't you?"

"Yes, Margie, I promise."

"And if you want anything different, you'll go to Mrs. Chubbe, won't you?" Margery's heart was assailed by doubts; had she done the right thing for her boy? Jerry nodded; something in his throat forbade speech, and they entered through the tiny green gate.

It was a fitting cottage for such a lane. Low, rose-covered, with a porch of lattice work, and casement windows upon whose snowy sills stood flower pots, red ochred, and filled with fiery geraniums. A garden surrounded it—a garden of gnarled old apple trees, currant bushes and old fashioned flowers—and the whole was sunk amidst dark woods, interspersed with sunny cornfields. On the pathway, cobbled and uneven, sat a great black cat, alternately washing and sunning itself in the mellow afternoon light. It looked up at the approaching footsteps with a glance of curiosity, then resumed its task complacently. Yet the whole picture awoke unpleasant feelings in Jerry's heart. He edged away from the animal, clutching Margery's protecting hand. For somehow a sense of danger crept into his mind. In just such a cottage might have dwelt the wicked witch, who so often figured in daddy's story, and a conviction grew like a seed, bigger and bigger with each confirming incident, that the widow was indeed a witch, seeking little children only to devour them later.

But though terror had him in her clutches, he said nothing. What child ever told its fears? Only as they stood in the porch did a gleam of hope arise. Over the fields, afar off, yet near enough to distinguish it quite plainly, watched Church Clock, and a thrill of pleasure came as he caught sight of its friendly face, and heard the cheerful voice chime out four hours. The door was shut. A trifle perhaps, but trifles count for much.

"She can't surely have forgotten," murmured Margery, rapping briskly again. Presently footsteps came along the passage, slow wandering footsteps, and a hand lifted the latch. But ah, for the tale a door can tell! The quick, wide throw-

back, which is almost simultaneous with warm kisses and glad greeting; the reluctant, slow movement, when neither guest nor host is particularly pleased to see the other. Then there's the prim, conventional opening by a maid, which means nothing, and is only the prologue to the real welcome. Lastly comes the suspicious door, slowly opening a few inches, suggestive of a foot lurking behind to add strength, if necessary to close it quickly.

But neither of these things happened to that particular door. The fingers fumbled a little, then it opened—not too slowly, not too quickly; neither was it too wide, nor too narrow, quite a polite door; just enough for the widow to stand on the threshold.

She was a large woman, heavy, round-faced, and neatly dressed in brown merino, with a turn down linen collar round her voluminous neck. Jerry was fascinated by the many chins, also by something she wore on her head, something which was hair and yet seemed out of keeping with the rest. It was kept in its place by a band of velvet, to Jerry vaguely suggestive of a crown. Afterwards he grew quite intimate with it, even to fetching it from its hiding place in the tallboy behind the kitchen door, and calling it by its rightful name—"My front."

She smiled, but to Jerry it was like the creasing and uncreasing of a piece of daddy's modelling clay—just as real; and again the thought rose, and firmly fixed itself in his little mind that she was a witch.

"Very pleased to see you, Mrs. Marvin." The superior politeness of the widow's tone—also her choice of words, had much to do with the favourable impression made on Margery. "Step in, do. And this is the little boy. How do you do, little boy? I hope you're good, and love your books and tasks. This way, Mrs. Marvin; mind the step."

She led them through a passage, down a stair, into the tidiest, most spotless room imaginable. Margery looked her approval, not so Jerry. Used to the litter and jumble of an

artist's domain, and, alas! inheriting the love of it, the cold cleanliness sent a shiver through his frame. It was papered with a flowery paper, and hung with pictures. Jerry grew to know them in time, and to loathe them with the loathing of an artistic nature for what is insincere in art. The table was set with the best china, her grandmother's, white, with pale blue roses twined round it, perfect and complete. Never had crack or stain disfigured its glistening surface, and the great silver teapot, also an inheritance, glistened and gleamed with a kind of cold welcome.

"Sit down, m'am, and make yourself at home; I'll just make the tea." Margery obeyed, and drew Jerry near to her.

"She never asked me to take off my bonnet," was the unspoken thought. To have tea, or die in a bonnet, were things alike indecent in Margery's ken. She glanced at the dishes on the table. Etiquette forbade her to do so in her hostess's presence, and again her heart sank with dismay. Accustomed to the farmhouse tea, with its loaded table and bountiful supply, the plate of thin bread and butter, another of pound cake, and a small dish of wafer cut ham, seemed all too scanty for three hungry people. Then, with an angry contempt for her thoughts, she told herself that the widow was poor.

"She's done her best, poor thing. When she gets extra, she'll have better food."

The widow rambled back, bearing the teapot and an elaborate cosy of woollen flowers and moss. Margery comforted herself with the fact that everything was elegant to a degree. At least he would be taught manners, and at Mrs. Chubbe's —well! On the whole things seemed to be arranging themselves. The bread and butter was excellent, so was the ham, as much as there was of them; and the pound cake was rich with butter and yellow with eggs. But something in Jerry's throat swelled so that the food stuck. Even the tea only went down in gulps, and something perilously like water came to his eyes.

"I hope you're not a dainty little boy," said the widow, with a touch of frost in her voice. Margery hastened to correct the impression. "Oh, dear no, m'am. He can eat everything most times. It's just that he's feelin' dull-like, at me going. Isn't it, my lamb?" Jerry nodded and made valiant attacks on the bread and butter, with a keen consciousness of the widow's disapproving look. At last it was over and they rose.

"You'd like to see his room, m'am, afore you go, I'm thinking." Up the steep deal stairs, scoured ivory white, and sandwiched between walls, they went, the widow leading, Jerry bringing up the rear with his dot-and-go-one step —a step which had to be assisted with his hands, so high and steep were the rises. At the top was a tiny landing, papered with a paper of red roses, just the sort of paper for a witch. There were no doors apparently, but the widow touched, and lo!—a door in the paper opened. Magic, for sure. She stood aside, and Margery, taking Jerry's hand, passed in. There was only room for two.

"What a nice room," she cried approvingly; "and so clean."

The cleanliness did not appeal to Jerry, but for some reason, the room did. It was very small, with ceilings that sloped down on either side, only leaving a small wall of paper—still roses. An iron truckle bedstead stood in one corner, which Margery eyed longingly. The desire to inspect sheets and blankets was almost overpowering, but with the widow in the doorway, she refrained.

Most of the room was gable, ending in a small casement window, and Jerry pulled Margery towards it. Over the gay, sweet-smelling garden it looked, over the summer fields, and, leaving the deep, grassy lane on the right, Jerry caught two landmarks which thrilled his small heart and took away some of the loneliness. Church Clock, now, it seemed to him, wearing a face of grave friendliness, as though it said, "Cheer up, little Jerry, I'm here; and shall be here when you're gone away. And I've seen lonely little children be-

fore; yet time has gone on and things have come right. Everything comes to those who wait, Jerry boy. You'll hear me strike, and you'll say, 'Another hour gone—another hour nearer to Margery, another hour nearer to fairyland.' "

This is what the Clock said, but Jerry didn't know it in so many words; only it was a face from the past looking down on him. And then, as again his glance wandered, he saw a familiar stack of chimneys. Curling blue smoke came from them, and as it wreathed and circled towards him, it, too, seemed to say, "All right, Jerry. Betty's here, and I've got lots of messages from her; and when I boil the kettle on Sunday you'll be here."

Margery's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"You'll be happy here, Master Jerry, won't you, my dearie?"

There was a wistful expression on her face, something beseeching an affirmative answer, and he tried hard to nod. But the effort failed; the tears, kept back so manfully, burst out. In a moment he was gathered in her arms and held close.

"Oh, Margery, dear, dear Margery, don't go." The widow's face, which had creased itself into puckers during the survey, now uncreased. She shook her head mournfully.

"I'm afraid you're a naughty little boy," she said. The remark was lost on Jerry, even Margery heard without hearing, and sighing deeply, the hostess betook herself to the stairs, creaking slowly down. Margery, her own tears falling freely, sat down on the bedstead, and held the sobbing child closer.

"Don't cry, my lamb, don't cry. See, you're breaking Margery's heart. You wouldn't do that, lovey, would you?"

Jerry's head shook; he strangled back the biggest sobs.

"An' it won't be long before we have a little house together —you and I, Master Jerry. An' Betty will come an' see us, an' we'll have some chickens, an' a little pig—an'—an'—" Margery's voice choked; she turned it to a cough, "An' I'll have such a many tales to tell you about Canada. Oh, Master Jerry, my precious, don't fret so; don't, my dearie."

Jerry rubbed the tears from his eyes, and laying his little puzzled head on his nurse's shoulder, was silent, except for the sighing sobs, which gradually subsided. It was on the tip of his tongue to express his opinion of the mistress of the house, but something seemed to tell him that Margery wouldn't understand. She always laughed at daddy's fairy tales. He would tell Betty on Sunday. She wouldn't laugh. And Margery, knowing nothing of the terrible fear in her boy's heart, thought him comforted, and with a last kiss, whispered that they must go downstairs. The widow would think them rude folk indeed.

So in the cool of the evening Margery left him; not for quite the last time.

"You'll be sure he gets off early, m'am, won't you?" she said anxiously, adding apologetically, "it's early, I know, but I'm sure you won't mind for once." The widow creased up her face and promised.

"I'm an early riser myself," she replied. "The little boy shall be ready."

"Thank you, m'am, thank you. Good-night, Master Jerry, lovey; it won't be long before morning."

Jerry stood in the doorway, a forlorn little figure. The widow turned in as the gate closed, and with a hurried glance to make sure that the coast was clear, he fled down the pathway.

"Good-bye, Margie—good-bye," he whispered excitedly, and Margery from the lane called back, waving her hand. Another moment, and the trees hid her from sight; he caught a flutter of the brown gown. It vanished, and loneliness fell like a heavy curtain.

In spite of all, Jerry slept sound that night. The hour after Margery left had been an hour of torture. The widow had restored the sitting-room to its normal condition; had ranged the horsehair-seated chairs against the wall in cold gentility; the Bible was replaced on the round mahogany table; every crumb was swept up, and the funereal cheerlessness of a best room fell as the door was shut.

Jerry followed the widow into the kitchen. Here things wore a more comfortable, everyday aspect. The brick floor, red-ochred, was warmly bright, the cushions of the easy chair had dumped themselves into shapes; even a small, three-legged stool was polished with use.

The widow washed up silently, Jerry watching. Then, having put away the cups and saucers and emptied the bowl, she sat down in the easy chair, fitting the cushions to a nicety.

"You can sit on the stool, little boy," she said graciously. "It'll be bedtime soon."

Jerry sat down, still watching. The widow's face was a study; it was so round, and there were so many chins. Jerry counted four, and a baby one; the creases, too, were wonderful. It was quite interesting to watch them smooth out here, only to pucker up there. And soon, too, another phenomenon occurred. The loose, flabby mouth relaxed and fell open, the expressionless blue eyes winked and blinked, then closed, opened slowly once or twice, then closed again; a gentle puffing sound came, growing in intensity. Jerry, never having seen anyone but daddy asleep, watched in fascinated wonder and awe. Gradually, as he watched, the things in the room began to take life. He could see dim faces in them, which no doubt were real and could only be seen at night. There was a fat, bow-legged curving chair, which he was sure had once been an old gentleman. The little square, velvet-covered cushion, on which the widow's feet, clad in bulging, elastic side boots, rested, was, no doubt, a small busy woman, and a big shapeless ottoman could only have been a thumping farm lass, something like Sally at the inn. The iron shovel and poker were enchanted ladies, so slender and elegant were they.

Faces met him everywhere, and as the twilight fell, they peered at him from shadowy corners, from the wide open chimney; and the widow's clothes, hanging behind the door, became living things, with the shape of nothing that had ever lived.

Jerry sat without stirring, almost without breathing. It

was not exactly fear that he felt, only the consciousness was forcing itself upon him more and more every minute, that it really was a witch's cottage, and all that happened was magic. Perhaps, if he were very good indeed, she wouldn't change him into anything. He would try to please her, and just as he had made up his mind a loud "H-r-r-r" sent his heart to his mouth.

"H-r-r-r," went the witch. "H-r-r-r—" and then suddenly such a long "H-r-r-r," that Jerry, in spite of himself, started up, and the widow awoke.

"Dear me, I must have been asleep. Have you been there all the time, little boy?"

"Yes, m'am," said Jerry. The creases puckered up.

"I'm glad you're a quiet little boy. I don't like noisy children."

"No, m'am."

"And now, since you've been so good, you may bring me my slippers. They're in the corner."

She put the toe of a foot to the heel of the other, gave a long pull, and the elastic side boot flew off; repeating the process with the other, she gave a sigh of relief.

"You may put them on, little boy; and stand the others in the corner." Jerry hastened to obey—he knew now that to please the witch he must be quiet and do her bidding.

"Now you may go to bed, little boy; you won't want a candle. There's light enough to undress by."

Jerry obeyed, hesitating for a moment. Was it necessary to kiss the widow? He stole a glance. She had subsided into the chair again, and with a thankful feeling, he climbed the narrow staircase. He didn't really think he *could* have kissed a witch.

So the summer night stole on. A great, horned moon rose low on the horizon. It rose till it was level with Church Clock.

"Church Clock, Church Clock," it cried, "are you still watching?" Church Clock relaxed its gravity and smiled.

"I always watch," he said. "I'm watching two little lives now—so young, so tender, and one so full of trouble."

"But it will pass," cried the Moon.

"Yes, it will pass," answered Church Clock gravely; "but the trouble of a child, and the trouble of a woman, are the saddest things on earth, for no one knows it except themselves and the wise ones watching."

"Like you and me, friend," whispered the Moon. "Yes, I know, I've seen them—women and children—in poor homes, in palaces, in noisy streets, in quiet corners, and it's true—it's true. A child's sorrow and a woman's sorrow is sorrow indeed. Show me these children, Church Clock, and we will watch together."

So they peeped through the narrow garret window where Jerry lay.

"Did he say his prayers?" asked the Moon anxiously. "Did he say, 'Now I lay me down to sleep'?"

"Yes," answered Church Clock, "I don't let him forget his prayers. When I strike I say, 'Jerry boy—Prayers!' When I strike in the morning, I shall say, 'Don't forget to wash, Jerry.'" The Moon listened gravely.

"If he says his prayers and keeps himself clean, he won't come to much harm. Now for the other."

They peeped into the little dimity hung room, so white and sweet-smelling. The unruly mop of curls made a shining spot on the snowy pillows; the little busy hands and feet were quiet now, and the sparkling eyes closed. Church Clock smiled as he struck out midnight, and the Moon winked knowingly, and gave a broad grin as he rose higher in the sky. Down below in deep dark woods, Pan piped, but the grass on the mossy bank was short that night.

"Pan's showing his legs," whispered the fairies, peeping from foxgloves, and shivering; "it's not our turn." And from behind the trees, fauns and satyrs advanced clumsily, for they knew the music was for them that night.

CHAPTER III

JERRY GETS A CHARM BUT LOSES THE BROWNIE FAIRY

THE dawn was dimly faint in the east when the widow called Jerry.

"You can get a piece of bread and cheese, little boy," she said through the keyhole; "it's in the larder." The heavy footsteps rambled away, and Jerry jumped out of bed. He began to dress, but surely the buttons had multiplied in the night—he never remembered having so many. And yet the buttonholes seemed to have grown fewer. After much fumbling, a few clothes got into their places, and Church Clock struck four. He remembered that he must wash, and looked round for the basin and ewer. But there was nothing like them. What should he do? To wake a witch was out of the question. Perhaps if he finished dressing he might find some place downstairs. He put on his trousers, buckled the long belted tunic over, brushed his hair, and then, kneeling down, said a "Hail Mary."

How the stairs creaked. The dawn was breaking as he pushed open the kitchen door. It was warm and filled with shadows, but the faces were no longer there—only the remembrances of yesterday hung around. The stir and bustle of today would sweep them into the past.

He prowled round, and in the back'us found a sink and a pitcher of water. There was also a tin basin and a piece of soap—altogether a lucky find. Having washed, came an adventurous hunt for food. He opened several doors, each time with a beating heart—you never know what you may find behind the doors in a witch's house. But there was nothing out of the common. True, in a cupboard, stood a tall birch broom; that, no doubt, was the broomstick she used to fly on.

He closed the door, yet, so brave was he with the happiness of the day, that the thought came, suppose if he were very, very good, would she take him with her? It was a very long broom—quite long enough for two, when one was a little boy of seven.

At last the larder was reached, cool and dim, a larder and dairy combined. In an earthenware pan dwelt the bread, and under a cover Jerry found cheese. After that, rested and fed, everything was easy.

He knew better than to go out by the front door. Just lift the latch of the back'us door, in the country, and there you are—by day or night. The meadows and woods were dark and mysterious in the shadowy dawn. Faint lights in the sky gave a weird, spectral effect; the trees stood motionless. Silence, such as Jerry had never known, and the sense of adventure, slightly tempered by awe, increased. A bird chirruped drowsily somewhere, but a rustle in the pig-sty put mystery to flight, and he made his way to the front of the cottage.

Here the flowers were still sleeping. Dew-drenched roses hung heavy heads; crimson cloves lay against their grey-green leaves; the mignonette had closed, the daisies were tightly shut; only the lilies, "Our Lady's flowers," stood tall and straight, and Jerry stopped to poke his nose into their golden hearts.

Through the gate, into the still dark lane, up the grassy dew-wet way, over the tree roots. Birds, asleep in their nests, nettles, weeds and drowsy flowers in the ditch below, waited the sun's call to waken. Silence, darkness, bits of light here and there, now rosy tinted. Out of the lane, over a stile, across the meadow, and there was the farm. Curling blue smoke wreathed down to meet the little figure, Betty and Margery half way across to meet him, and Jerry was there! Oh! the sense of warmth—of comfort—of home.

The farmer, busily eating his breakfast, waved a cheerful knife by way of greeting, Mrs. Chubbe, with a kiss, lifted him over the settle, and Betty, her tongue going, as her aunt

said, "Nineteen to the dozen," climbed in beside him. Together they attacked the big bowls of rich, creamy bread and milk, for which Jerry, in spite of the casual larder feast, was ready, and then, through twisting, uneven passages, to the yard where Dickon, the farm boy, with many a "Whoa there!" and "Stan' still, lass!" was putting the mare in.

Mrs. Chubbe, assisted by Jenny and Sally, brought out pound after pound of sweet butter, shining yellow through their thin muslin coverings, baskets of brown and white eggs, and plump chickens with long limp necks, stiff yellow feet, and bodies icily cold even at midday in August. All these, with much talk and bustle, were packed in the light, spring cart. There was much protestation in the shape of creaking and groaning from the little cart as the farmer climbed up, as though it said, "I can't really carry you; I can't, I really can't," then with a last jerk, "Though if I must, I must. What! another—" as Margery got in, and Betty and Jerry were lifted up behind, with stern injunctions to keep their feet well out and not to kick the butter.

"Noo," said the farmer, tightening the reins, "ready's the word; good-bye, missus." The mare pricked up her head—lifted her feet; but a scream from Mrs. Chubbe arrested matters.

"What noo?" said the farmer under his breath, sticking the whip in its socket, and turning to look. His wife, with a frantic wave of her hand, which, being interpreted, meant "Wait!" vanished into the house, returning presently with a rush basket, which she handed up to her husband.

"Them's the apricots for Mrs. Plumtre; Jenny tells me their tree don't bear this year. An' mind an' not forget it, master; you're a rare hand at forgettin' when you get to market." The farmer smiled broadly, lifted the basket, and winked slowly and meaningly at Margery. Mrs. Chubbe caught it.

"Ah! you can wink. If you'd got a half of what I have to think on, I'll warrant you'd forget. An' after all—'twasn't forgot," she added triumphantly.

Once more the farmer cl-clicked; once more mare Kitty tossed her head, and put her best foot foremost. Over the cobble-tiled yard, round the gateposts they skimmed, Jerry and Betty holding on for dear life, into the broad high road which led to great cities, even to the sea. The farmer shook his head, sighed ponderously, and murmured thoughtfully, yet with a whimsical twist of his mouth, "Wimmen—wimmen—"

How the cart flew along! White, inch deep dust whirled and scattered, adding yet another layer to the choking hedges. There was no lack of company. Farm waggons, containing coops of live hens or geese ready for fattening; here and there a horse or pony, tethered behind, trotted head down, doubtless wondering who would be its next master.

But for the most part, the road was occupied by gigs and light carts, like the farmer's own, filled with buxom house wives intent on a day of business, combined with pleasure; shy rosy-faced lassies, with Heaven knows what anticipation in their innocent hearts; for on a market day the merry gods scatter adventures broadcast, and any moment a King Cophetua may arise and bear off a beggar maid. So the road was gay that August morning, and the farmer, between frisky Kitty and neighbourly salutations, had his hands full. Even Margery plucked up heart and smiled, while Jerry, all trouble thrown to the wind for the time, relaxed from solemnity, even laughing outright at some of Betty's sallies. Betty's tongue went as fast as Kitty's feet, which is saying much. So the eight miles flew by, and it was yet early morning when they clattered into the market town of Channington. The clock over the town hall was striking the hour; such a bustle and confusion—narrow, cobble-paved streets filled with vehicles—and echoing voices—men's voices, women's voices, voices shrill and loud, voices gentle and sweet, gruff voices, harsh voices, the high pipe of children, the rippling laughter of maidens—all sorts of voices chattered and babbled, rose and fell, as Kitty dropped to a walking pace and joined the procession to the Swan, Channington's hostelry and coaching inn.

The house itself was of white stone, standing slightly back from the road, with doors and windows scattered promiscuously about it. It dated from Elizabeth, but had been added to here and altered there, till little was left to mark the date. On one side a wide entrance leading to the yard was spanned by an arch, and under this the line of vehicles slowly moved.

The noise and bustle of the street were as peace compared with those of the yard. Ostlers and grooms ran to and fro, unharnessing, baiting—for some of the horses had come many miles—and wheeling away light carts. Men, awaiting assistance, shouted to each other, or called impatiently for someone to take their horses. Women and children alighted and sauntered to the entrance, where they awaited their lords. Porters carried merchandise to the market stalls; horses neighed and whinnied, pawing the ground impatiently; and from the low gallery, running round three sides and used for the loading and unloading of the coaches, those inside the inn talked to their friends below, exchanging impressions of the day, the chances of business, and social gossip.

Outside the arch an ever shifting crowd of loafers hung around, some on the lookout for a job, but for the most part idlers, ripe for sport, sight-seeing, mischief, or anything that might turn up. And to this medley of humanity the light cart added its occupants. Farmer Chubbe, landlord of the Cloudesley Arms and large farmer to boot, was, as things went, a man of standing in the neighbourhood. A couple of stablemen hastened to his assistance. Throwing the reins to them he climbed out, helped Margery to descend, and lifted the children to the ground.

Betty's dark eyes sparkled with delight. The noise, the gaiety, appealed strongly to her passionate nature; her feet twitched restlessly, the colour came and went, and she pulled her uncle's hand impatiently.

"Softly, softly, Betty wench," he smiled down at her, "the day's young yet. Well, then, Mrs. Marvin, you'll be back by

nine. The coach is due to leave at the half hour. We'll walk together as far as town hall."

So they started, all four of them; the children hand in hand, following the older folk, turned down a side street, and wending their way through the pushing, jostling, good-humoured crowd, were, within three minutes, in the market place; indeed, the back windows of the Swan looked directly down upon the wide square. And here was, indeed, a sight to make Betty's gay little heart rejoice.

The town hall, breathing dignity, and holding secrets of wonderful doings therein—balls, assemblies, and gatherings of all sorts—stood in its midst. Underneath, on one side, was the covered market place, cool and shady—a fitting place on a hot day for butter, cream, poultry, and perishable articles. Outside, where the stalls, at this time of the day comparatively empty, stood thick as blackberries on a hedge, and their owners chattered, whispered and worked—where sober farmers gathered in little knots, their sample bags in their hands, their horny palms holding specimens of the contents, heads close together and only a word now and again—outside was all fun, and Betty clutched her companion's hand in a little hot, excited clasp.

The farmer brought up. "Well, missis, we'll see you later." Margery nodded.

"Come, Master Jerry dear, come with Margie."

Jerry obeyed; Betty was dear, but Margery more so. This last hour was just for themselves. Betty transferred her hand to her uncle's, who was already deep in the mysteries of prices. "Don't be long, Jerry," she called after them; "it'll be such fun soon."

They crossed the square, turned down an alley shaded by great trees in the gardens behind the walls, past the old church and churchyard, and came into a smaller square, where quiet houses lay on either side. In one corner was a newer building, and to this Margery led the way. She passed through the tiny gate, pushed open a heavy door, and another atmosphere

greeted them—an atmosphere of dimness, perfume, and shafts of dancing sunshine, of marbles, stained windows and flickering light; of muffled footsteps, whispering voices and echoes. It was nothing new to Jerry; he dipped a fat forefinger into the stone basin outside, and touched himself in the sign of the Cross; inside he made obeisance in orthodox fashion.

"Sit down, dearie," whispered Margery, "an' wait for me. I'll not be long. Father Andrew expects me."

She found him a comfortable seat in one of the pews, and disappeared into the confessional box. Jerry sat very still; as still as in the witch's kitchen, but with very different feelings. There was no fear now, only a holy awe. The figures in their niches, Our Lady from her altar, looked down with gentle eyes, and little boy as he was, Jerry had the true Catholic's sense of intimate family relations with the Saints and the Holy Mother—the feeling of home—in their dwelling place. And for him there was that no longer, for who could call a witch's cottage, home?

Sweet breath of incense stirred the air, the far off droning inside the wooden erection ceased, a door opened and Margery came out. Her face was serious, but happier than before; there was rest in it.

"It does a body good," she said, as Jerry scrambled to his feet, "to confess her sins and get absolution. An' now, my dearie, we'll make an offering to the blessed St. Monica, an' perhaps she'll keep an eye on you."

Jerry's little feet clattered over the marble floor of the Chapel of the Dedication, waking the echoes, till they reached the altar where the gleaming candles burned like stars, and the porphyry and alabaster, jacinth and lapis lazuli glowed like a painter's palette newly wet. For the Chapel of St. Monica was a gift from Edward, 10th Earl of Cloudesley, and nothing had been spared in its decoration.

Margery dropped her money into the box, took a candle, and lighting it from another, set it on a spike. Then, together, they knelt before the altar, and Margery put up a

petition, while Jerry, with hands clasped, gazed into the beautiful face, and wondered if she was anything like daddy's fairy. She, too, was in white, and her name began with an M. He was sure of that, although his literary accomplishments were at present confined to words of three letters. Another pause before the high altar, and then Margery sat down in a side pew, and drew him very close.

"Master Jerry, my dearie, there's something I've got to say to you. If God an' the blessed Saints are willing, I'll be back in a year, but there's always the chance against it, 'specially in a country where they'd as lief scalp your head as look at you. So, lovey, if I don't come back quite as soon as I expected, remember you're a gentleman, an' that you mustn't say naughty words, nor do bad things, an' that daddy and the angels are watching you. You'll try, Master Jerry, my dearie, won't you?"

The wrinkled, rosy face was working, and when the child put his arms round her and pressed his warm lips and cheeks to hers, the tears rolled down unrestrained.

"Don't cry, Margie, darling. I will be good. I will—I will. I promise. I promised daddy, and now I promise you. Oh, Margie, don't cry."

She held him closer for a few minutes, then put the clinging arms from her, and smiled again.

"There, Margie's a silly old woman, isn't she? Why, this time next year we'll all be together again, won't we, my dearie? An' now, Master Jerry," her tone changed, she was once more the everyday Margery, "there's something your daddy told me to give to you—something—" she was busy fumbling in the big pocket worn under the brown linsey skirt; "yes, here it is."

It was a small linen bag, containing something hard, and attached to a long cord. This she slipped over the child's neck, tucking it safely in.

"Master Jerry," she said solemnly, "don't you ever part with it—an' don't take it off except to wash. An' it's not

to be opened till you're twenty. See, it's sealed, with your daddy's big seal."

Jerry gazed at the funny little parcel, at the big splash of red, and the cabalistic lettering. Margery went on.

"There's a bit of the true cross inside as well; I begged it from Father Andrew last time I was here. It'll keep you safe, my dearie. An' now, we must go; Town Clock's striking the quarter."

Out into the quiet square, down the sun-flecked alley, into the hustle-bustle of the busy market place. Things had progressed since they left; the stalls were set out; a Cheap Jack was giving his first demonstration, and all was ready for the day.

In the street leading to the Swan they found the farmer and Betty; Betty in a state of wild excitement. She flew to meet them.

"Oh, Jerry, Jerry, there's a circus and a giddy-go-round, and Uncle Matt says he'll take us when—when—" she hesitated, sobering slightly at the remembrance of the coming parting, "I mean, in the afternoon. You'll like that, Jerry, won't you?"

Jerry nodded; at any other time he would have responded readily, but now the time was getting so short. He clung tightly to Margery as they entered the inn, for through the red-curtained window of the parlour he caught a glimpse of the coach standing in the yard, ready, it seemed to him, to trap his only friend and carry her away. There were others waiting; passengers snatching a hasty meal before proceeding on their journey, market folk eating bread and cheese. An ordinary was served at midday, but from three to twelve noon is a long time for hungry, working people. A rosy-cheeked serving maid answered the summons, and the farmer gave his orders.

"Pint o' home-brewed, a loaf, an' a bit o' old Cheshire; that's—" he tapped himself jocularly. "Cake'n milk for the

little 'uns, an' for you, missis?" he turned to Margery—she hesitated for a moment, and the farmer turned again.

"She'll have a glass o' the same as me. Best in all the county, missis, you can take my word; Mrs. Plumtre knows her business, an' here she is, herself." A short, plump, bustling woman entered and seized the farmer's hand.

"Well, farmer, an' how be ye the day? An' Missis Marvin, good soul, I'm fair glad to see you. An' how's the missis? Will ye thank her for the apricots, an' tell her they came like flowers in May. Just what I was a-wantin', for apricots be queer things; they'll bear bushels for two, three year, an' then never a one, an' that's ours this summer. An' how's little miss? Come an' give Auntie Plumtre a kiss." She gathered Betty in her arms and administered a sounding smack. Betty returned it demurely, then, safe sheltered behind her uncle's broad back, wiped her cheek and made a grimace to Jerry, nearly upsetting his gravity. She liked Mrs. Plumtre, but her mode of salutation was not altogether to Miss Betty's taste. Of this, however, the good woman knew nothing.

"An' this is the little boy who's going to live with Widow Hagges, I suppose. The father's gone, I hear," she added in an undertone to Margery. "Well, well—in the midst of life we're in death, so parson says, an' never a truer word. Poor child, poor child." She sat down and lifted Jerry to her knee.

"You're a big boy to be nursed, laddie, I'm thinkin'; but I nursed my own boy till he was bigger'n you by two years."

"Have you got a little boy, m'am?" Jerry asked interestedly.

"No, my dear; leastways, not now. He's a grown man, an' he's gone to Lunnon, an' to see the world. But there," suddenly remembering, she put him down, "I'm keepin' you all. Come along wi' me, out o' the crowd. Sally—" the rosy maid curtseyed, "bring Farmer Chubbe's orders to the sitting-room."

She led the way across passages newly sanded for the day, through rooms, filled, it seemed to Jerry, with people and

furniture, bustle and noise, into a quiet room looking out on one side to the market place, while on the other was a small window, through which yard-proceedings could be watched.

"Sit ye down, sit ye down," she said hospitably, "an' make a good meal. Ye'll be tired, Mrs. Marvin, I'm thinkin', afore you reach Lunnon."

"Aye, that she will," put in the farmer. "She'll get her dinner at Chedham; coach stops at the King's Head."

"An' a rare good house 'tis," replied the landlady. "Joe Denson knows how to serve a good dinner—never a better—but he can't beat my ale; he says so hisself. 'How d'ye do it, Mrs. Plumtre?' says he, for he travels this way once a year; 'when you're wantin' a job,' says he, 'you come to me. I'll take you on for the brewin'.' "

The farmer assented cordially and the meal went on, well seasoned with the landlady's gossip. Betty and Jerry were silent; Jerry from nature, and Betty because, naughty puss as she was, she knew her manners, and to speak at meals before grown-up folk was a sin worthy of the decalogue. A stir outside roused them. Mrs. Plumtre peered through the little window, and Jerry slid his hand into Margery's.

"They're putting the horses to an' Danel's finishing his bread an' cheese in the parlour. Happen ye'd like a wash, m'am; 'twould freshen you a bit."

Jerry clung to Margery's hand and together they followed their guide upstairs. Oh, the intricacies of that ancient place! The winding passages, uneven floors, stairs here, stairs there, leading to still more rooms and passages. They reached their haven at last; the cool, sober room, with its great four-poster hung with drab moreen, trimmed fantastically with black velvet. High presses of rich red mahogany stood around, the only relief being a dressing table, gaily draped with muslin over pink cambric, concealing a deep box drawer. A wonderful room, thought Jerry, used to cheerless London bedrooms or cheap lodging-houses. And the water from the pretty

red ewer seemed somehow fresher than water usually was.

The confusion in the yard was greater than ever; in the midst of it they found the farmer. The horses were in; a few belated parcels caused much commotion. Passengers stood about; those who had already journeyed, with a nonchalant air, the fresh ones busy giving and taking last messages.

The little group were silent—tongue-tied when it came to the last; only Jerry's clasp tightened, and he laid his cheek against the dear hand he held. Margery struggled against appearances, then gave in, and, big boy as he was, lifted him in her arms and held him closely. Out of the inn came a jovial, burly personage, booted, gaitered, and clad in a coat of many capes and pockets. It was open now for comfort, showing glimpses of bright waistcoat beneath. A beaver hat surrounded the round genial face, weather beaten and burnt to a glorious brick red.

He finished the contents of a glistening pewter pot on the threshold; then, handing it to an ostler, wiped his mouth on the back of a huge, hairy paw, drew out a silver watch the size of a turnip, and entered the yard. Then indeed was bustle. Grooms at the horses' heads, ladders behind, at either side of the coach, passengers mounting, then remembering something left, dismounting, encountering other passengers coming up—old passengers, young passengers, thin ones who tripped gaily up, fat ones who required pushing and pulling, bags and baggage still arriving, and above all, the din of voices.

"That's your place, Mrs. Marvin," said the farmer, "back in the middle, an' it's time you mounted."

There was a dimness in the farmer's blue eyes—even Betty softened. The tears ran unchecked down Margery's cheeks. Only Jerry was calm. He nestled his head against her shoulder with a grave look in his brown eyes; something seemed to hurt him inside—like the clutch of a cold hand, but he had no desire to cry. There were pitying looks cast at the little group. Farmer Chubbe's guests were well known by hearsay.

"Time's up, ladies and gents," said Daniel. "Take your seats." The farmer put out his hand and took Margery's, working it solemnly up and down.

"A year's soon gone, missis; you'll be back afore you know you're gone." She nodded, unable to speak; then bent, and kissed Betty warmly. But her voice came triumphantly as she clasped the child she held still closer.

"Good-bye, Master Jerry—good-bye, my dearie—my darlin'."

A last kiss, a last embrace, and the farmer took him from her arms. The coach swam before her. Someone lifted her up; kindly passengers, with looks of pity, made room, helping her to her place. Even Daniel gave her a sympathising glance as he looked down into the yard to see that all was right; then drew the reins tighter. The conductor mounted—Margery smiled down, a faint wan smile, and Jerry smiled gravely back.

"Ready, lads!" The grooms leaped back, the prancing horses, fresh from their night's rest, flew like the wind. "Tantivy—tantivy!" the horn sounded its merry farewell; waving handkerchiefs, last good-byes, and the Comet was gone—round the corner, into a dim wonderful region called the road to London. It was over, the event of market day. Ostlers and grooms disappeared as by magic, loafers strolled away, friends of the passengers betook themselves to other business. In a few minutes the yard was empty, and the depressing silence which follows excitement fell. Still holding Jerry, the farmer took his niece's hand.

"Come, children, let's go an' have a look round." Betty's hopes rose. Surely the market place would restore Jerry to his usual self; for there was something different, she felt instinctively. The farmer understood; he talked to Betty, and let the tired little heart rest and recover itself. It was not very long before Jerry roused to a sense of his dignity.

"If you please, Mr. Chubbe, I think I'll get down now. And thank you very much for carrying me."

"That's a brave little lad." The farmer set him on his feet,

pleased to see the signs of returning interest. "An' now, suppose we go an' buy some lollipops, an' see how butter's sellin'."

Betty's legs capered gleefully; she peered round her uncle to see what effect the announcement had on Jerry, and her face fell. But hardbake and sugar sticks are wonderful restoratives, and her blithe laugh and chattering tongue did more to rouse Jerry than any sympathy from older folk.

At twelve o'clock, with appetites of those whose conscience is clear and health rude, they went back to the Swan, where roast beef, mellow and juicy, with vegetables fresh cut from the inn garden, were served; while for those who preferred daintier fare there were ducks, who, but two days before, had paddled in the great pond and strutted about the yards. Green peas were there too, with monstrous raspberry and currant pies, black currant puddings, lusciously purple, and jugs of thick yellow cream.

Even Jerry was hungry, and as the farmer piled his plate with good things he looked up with a gravely childish smile which went straight to the good man's heart. After dinner came more delights. Out on the green were swings and merry-go-rounds. On this last Betty would fain have gone, greatly to the disgust of Mrs. Plumtre, who accompanied them.

"Fie on you, little miss," she said reprovingly, "them's for boys—not for nice little gals."

But the circus was all that heart—even Betty's—could desire. Clowns, fairies, performing animals, all complete, and when at last the light cart was brought out, Betty gave a sigh of pure delight.

"It's been the most beautifullest day in all my life," she cried, as she was lifted up.

A tired little boy was Jerry when they arrived at Cloudesley. How he wished he could stay with Mr. Chubbe and Betty, instead of moving on again. So much had happened since he got out of bed that morning; the cottage seemed like a dream of long ago; something vague, mysterious—there was nothing human about it. Had a Genie passed over

the farm, carrying off the cottage, witch and all, in a cloud of smoke, it would not have surprised him in the least. But reality drew near. After the homely substantial tea, the farmer rose.

"Now, laddie, time you're off. Widow'll be expectin' you. Betty wench, you can go to the top of the lane with him."

Over the fields, where the setting sun hung in a crimson glow behind a low misty haze, and the subtle, indistinguishable scent of a thousand flowers and grasses rose, they went hand in hand, the farmer and his wife watching from the door.

"Poor Jerry," said Betty compassionately, remembering, now the excitement was over, her companion's trouble. "But Mrs. Marvin'll soon be back, won't she? She said so. And I'm so glad you didn't have to go away with her, 'cos now we can have such beautiful games, every day, can't we?"

"I don't know," said Jerry dubiously. He was not at all sure what might be expected of him. Then, as things began to wear a more cheerful aspect, "P'raps she'll let me, if I'm a very good little boy. I hope she will."

"Oh, she will if I ask her," said Miss Betty, confident of her own capability to cajole. "I'll come and fetch you on Sunday, if Aunt Martha'll let me. I'll learn my hymn and verses quick."

They had reached the last stile; Betty threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. "Good-bye, Jerry," she cried, running off with the heedlessness of childhood, but turning several times to wave her hand to the forlorn little figure standing by the stile.

He was alone now, quite alone; except for the witch and the cat, and the bogie things which dwelt in the cottage and made faces at him. For a few minutes he watched the flitting white form, then turned with a heavy sigh and climbed the stile. Before him lay the lane, darkly green where the fading light fell, black in the shadows, and Jerry's small heart beat loudly, and his feet trotted faster as each fearful place was passed. For who knew what might lurk behind the tree

trunks, or in deep ditches. On the other hand—he cheered himself with the thought—good fairies lived in the same places. He found his way to the back door and knocked.

"Come in," said the widow's voice, and he advanced through the kitchen. Yes, it was no dream. There it was, just the same as last night. The widow in her chair, the geraniums on the window sill, the coppers and brasses in their places—only the widow was awake, and everything else asleep or pretending to be.

"So you've come back, little boy," she said graciously.

"Yes, m'am."

"An' now, before you go to bed, you can draw me a bucket of water from the well. Did you find the pump this morning? I forgot to show you last night. I hope you're a good little boy, and wash yourself every morning."

Jerry's heart sank. Was he expected to wash at the pump? Farmer Chubbe's boys did, he knew, but he, Jerry, who had always had a nice basin with plenty of soap, and sometimes even warm water, and Margery's gentle hands to assist. Besides, he was a gentleman. Margery said so, and gentlemen didn't wash at pumps.

On the other hand, daddy said it didn't matter what you did, and he had promised Margery to wash, and, perhaps, this carrying much weight, there was the need to propitiate the witch. The colour came and went in his brown face. Then, child as he was, Jerry made up his mind. He would wash at the pump.

"Yes, m'am." The widow had not waited for the answer, only she saw the hesitation.

"You'll find the pail in the back'us; wind up the windlass and fill it."

Out into the yard went Jerry. His fat little hands grasped the handles, and with a great effort he managed to move the heavy wheel. After that it was easy, and there was a certain amount of boyish delight at seeing the bucket come up,

dripping with cold, clear water. He filled his pail, and carried it with both hands indoors.

"That's a good little boy," said the widow, "an' now you can get a slice of bread from the pantry and go to bed."

He was not hungry, but hardly felt sufficiently at home to refuse the offer. Having got the bread, he said "Good-night, m'am," and climbed the stairs, feeling very lonely, very tired, and filled with a longing to climb into someone's warm arms and cry away the bitter heartache. He undressed, said his prayers, and got into bed. Then a few salt tears came creeping up; but they weren't the right sort; the sort that clear away aches; moreover, they were soon over. For a little while he lay looking out on to the dark skies. Then suddenly came a dim radiance, growing brighter and brighter. Above the window sill appeared a brilliant golden rim; presently a great laughing yellow face looked in, and all the world changed. Jerry almost laughed back, then raised himself, and behold, just beneath the window frame, peeped another friendly face. He sank back comforted, and almost before he touched his pillow, was fast asleep.

A little gentle noise roused him from dreams—happy dreams, in which daddy played games and told stories; in which Margery, Betty, and the farmer moved, and all was merry and gay, just as in the old time. With waking came reality and consciousness of troubled loneliness. The cold grey dawn made the little room alive with shadows of waving trees outside, and of things inside which cast strange and fantastic shapes on the walls. Half asleep, half awake, he watched them change into their ordinary forms as the light increased, all the time dimly conscious of that soft, quiet movement. What could it be? Very cautiously he sat up and peered through the dim greyness. The sound came from the gable end of the room, where presently something crimson caught his eye, telling him the solution. The slice of bread, left untouched on a box, had attracted a daring robin. Jerry

held his breath with delight as he watched. The visitor peeped round at him with bright eyes, but took no other notice, then hopped to the other side. Having sampled each crumb, he did a little reconnoitring, picking at the box on the chance of its being something edible, then hopping to a chair and inspecting the folded garments, finally, with an impudent toss of his head, which made the watcher laugh outright, he spread his wings and flew through the open window. Jerry cuddled down again; a new idea had taken possession. What if he could entice him back and tame him? How delightful to have a pet. Daddy had often said he should have a dog, but it had never been just the right time. With his head full of plans, he fell asleep, only waking with the stir of morning.

The day was long. It began with a tussle with the pump, which got the better of him, soaking him with a malicious burst of water. Luckily, the widow, through the kitchen window, saw the catastrophe, and sent him up to change his clothes, while she dried the wet ones. In return for this, Jerry assisted during the morning; dried the china, dug potatoes, peeled them and shelled peas, and sat down to his dinner, a hungry, but on the whole, not an unhappy little boy.

Dinner was an ordeal. The peas were good, so were the potatoes, so was the slice of bacon which the widow placed on his plate; only Jerry, used to plain food but plenty, could have eaten twice as much. The widow helped herself to the remainder, which, although he was a polite little boy, he couldn't help noticing was three times as much as his own, and put the dish down for the cat. Jerry did his best to eke it out, but long before the widow had finished hers, he sat gazing with dismay at the empty plate.

"Little boys should eat their food slowly," she said severely, slewing a piece of bread round and round in the gravy, "and," with a glance at the well scraped plate, "leave a bit for manners."

Jerry's face grew scarlet with shame and a certain amount of indignation. This was the beginning and end of the con-

versation. A small black currant pudding completed the meal, unless you can count as a course the ten minutes spent by the widow over her glass of ale, while Jerry's feet had pins and needles, and all his body was tingling with a child's desire for talk and laughter and healthy companionship. In the afternoon the widow knitted and nodded, and he was free to play. He gazed wistfully across the fields to where the curling smoke beckoned, but he was not sure if the widow would be angry; moreover, Betty had a task of needlework every afternoon and must not be disturbed. After tea, when the cups and saucers were washed and put away, the fire made up, and the business of the day finished, came the fearful hour when the witch slept and things came to life.

Perhaps the lonely daylight hours added their touch of mystery, or maybe the presence of Tibby, the cat, on the knitted hearthrug, completed the charm. Anyhow, more things came alive, more faces looked at him, and the air was heavy with magic. Then it was that Jerry knew he must tame the robin. Of course, it was a good fairy, and as long as he came, goblins and enchanted creatures could do him no harm. Although that night he could have eaten half a loaf, he refrained, only taking part of the slice, putting the remainder in the same place as before.

CHAPTER IV

HOW JERRY FOUND AND LOST A GOOD FAIRY

HE had his reward. The same soft movement roused him, and again he watched. This time, having finished his meal, the visitor took a survey, heedless of the entranced gaze fixed upon him, then, to Jerry's unbounded delight, hopped on to the low rail of his bed, and for a moment, before flying away, stood looking at him with saucy bright eyes.

That day, being Saturday, was extra busy. Everything that could be cleaned, was cleaned; everything that could be done, was done, in preparation for what the widow called "the Lord's day," to Jerry an unknown period. An air of bustle hung around. Fruit had to be picked, vegetables to be prepared; his hot little fingers were purple with stains, and exceedingly dirty, which did not trouble him. Something else did though.

When tea was over, instead of subsiding as usual, the widow rose solemnly, and fetched a great iron kettle from the back'us. This she filled and hung on the crane, then with slow, labouring footsteps left the kitchen. Jerry could hear her in one of the outhouses moving heavily. Something fell with a dull crash; there was an ejaculation from the widow, then a strange noise as of something bumping over stone floors. Jerry's heart stood still; there was something fearsome in the preparations. Was he at last to see some of the magic which, no doubt, went on when he was in bed? With wondering eyes he saw the widow approach, dragging and pushing a large wooden tub used for washing. Jerry flew to assist, and silently they placed it before the kitchen fire; then the widow paused for breath, dropped heavily into the chair, and pointed to the kettle.

"When it boils," she said, in the tone of an incantation,

"you can undress; it's Saturday night, and children always have baths on Saturday night. I used to when I was a little girl."

Jerry listened in fascinating amazement. What sort of a little girl could she have been? A little girl with a fat face, no doubt. And the wondering thought found words.

"Who gave you a bath, m'am?"

"My mother, of course, child." And in those words was hidden such a wealth of remembrance that silence followed. To Jerry they meant nothing. No mother had ever bathed him, nor kissed the chubby shoulders and arms, nor lovingly curled the dark clustering hair. Margery, kind and dear as she was, had taken the bath as part of a duty, and Jerry knew of nothing else. Only he wondered. But to the widow, perhaps for the first time for many years, came vague, far-off memories—of long forgotten things, of a dim childhood, and youth buried many a year ago, under the weight of bodily necessities and comforts. On the whole it was unpleasant. The rusty memory of old age is painful to stir, like its bones, and a sudden indignant spluttering from the kettle, saying clearly, "Take me off, take me off, I'm boiling," made her move with unusual alacrity.

"Go, fetch a pail of cold, child," she said, pouring the steaming water into the tub. The mixture was stirred to the right temperature, and the widow, from her chair, regarded the child with an expression more human than usual. She even beckoned him close, and fumbling with the buttons, helped him to undress.

It was a funny little fat figure in its undergarments; a mother would have dropped a kiss, a laugh, or a cuddle with each garment; but to the widow came no such promptings. It was a solemn ceremony, worthy of a Saturday night. One by one the small articles were folded and laid by, till Jerry stood in much the same attire as that in which he had come into the world, save and except the small bag hung round his neck by Margery.

"What's that, child?" asked the widow sharply. Jerry made a clutch.

"It's—it's—what Margie gave me." The plump fingers snatched, but Jerry hung on.

"Well, you can't keep it on in the water," continued the widow somewhat fretfully. "Give it to me."

"I'll put it on the table, m'am," said Jerry, after a slight hesitation. The other nodded—the time for argument was not yet. She was busy putting on a large apron and turning up her sleeves.

"Get in," came the command, and Jerry stepped over the edge. Ah, it was pleasant. It roused feelings of comfort and delight in cleanliness. But the widow's methods were drastic. Plenty of soap, administered freely, with no regard for nose or eyes or mouth, and much scouring of tender parts. But when at last it was over, the final scrubbing by a coarse towel sent a glow of delightful warmth over his small body, and he turned for the relic. Yet as he held it, it was snatched from him. Something surged in Jerry's mind; with a leap, he sprang to the chair and clutched at the hanging ribbon.

"It's mine! it's mine! You mustn't take it! It's mine!"

The widow looked up, mild as usual.

"What's the matter, child? I'm only looking at it."

Jerry, still with fingers entangled, only reiterated—

"It's mine, it's mine."

"I'm afraid you're a very passionate little boy." The tone was severe. "I'm not doing your ribbon any harm, only looking at it."

"But you mustn't; it's mine," answered Jerry wildly.

"Nonsense, child; a cat may look at a king," replied the widow vaguely. "What's in it?" Slightly calmed, but still holding tight, Jerry answered—

"It's a piece of the true Cross. Margie told me."

The widow sniffed dubiously, and felt with finger and thumb.

"That's not all—there's two things."

"It's what my daddy gave Margie for me. Oh, please—please, m'am—let me have it."

Jerry's feet and fingers twitched in a frenzy of impatience. "Wait a minute—let me see what it is."

Slowly she unloosened the mouth of the bag and, inserting a large finger and thumb, would have drawn out the contents, but Jerry was upon her.

"You shan't! you shan't! Margie said it wasn't to be opened. Oh! you're naughty—naughty! It's mine—mine!"

And before she realised it, the bag was snatched from her grasp, and Jerry stood in the middle of the floor, scarlet, panting, and frightened, but in possession. For a moment the widow stared helplessly—then broke out.

"Hoighty—toighty—here's a pretty to-do about nothing at all. You're a very rude little boy. Go to bed, and in the morning you can come and beg my pardon."

The mild reproof—mild, because the widow was too lazy and passionless to administer a stronger—had its effect. Was he rude? And conscience said "Yes." He ought to have waited. But, then he couldn't have had the bag opened. Perhaps if he had asked nicely and not put himself into a passion; yes, he was wrong, and nothing remained but to accept his punishment. He crept up to bed supperless, but with a mind fully intent on bearing it like a man. He hunted round for the remains of last night's bread, and finding a few crumbs, crept into bed with a somewhat heavy heart, but on the whole relieved that it had ended as it had.

After all, it seemed that he need not have troubled himself. The apology, hanging like a millstone round his neck, had to be got rid of, and the sooner the better. Mrs. Hagges, laying the cloth for breakfast, was startled by a small figure at her side.

"If you please, m'am, I'm sorry I was rude last night; I won't be again."

The widow stared. Truth to tell, she had almost forgotten

the episode, although at the time it had disturbed her somewhat. Children were an unknown species not allowed for in her calculations. It had not interfered with her night's rest; it would have taken more than other people's troubles to do that, and with the business of the morning the whole affair moved into the recesses of the past. But at the time it had ruffled her, and with its re-entry, came an unpleasant flavour. She answered somewhat tartly—

"Oh, well, I'm glad to hear you're sorry, for you were a very rude little boy. Now you can go and feed the chickens."

Perhaps of all the abasing rebuffs on this earth, that of a snub on the top of an apology is the greatest; more especially when the apologiser is also the weaker vessel, and more or less in the wrong. Not that the widow felt that. Somewhere, buried almost as deep as subconsciousness, was a pricking sensation which told her that she had no right to pry into Jerry's belongings.

Altogether, to both concerned, the thing was best forgotten. Nevertheless, as the ripples caused by a small stone may disturb mighty waters, so this little event left its marks—marks which, later on, made themselves felt.

But now to-day—this glorious August sabbath—was too good for aught but happiness. Jerry, with only a faint shadow left, made himself ready. He was to go with the Chubbes to the little chapel in the park, where Mass was served by Father Francis, Chaplain to my Lord Cloudesley; afterwards to dinner and tea at the inn. The widow, too, had company. Mr. Padden, minister of the Baptist Chapel she attended, returned to the cottage after service. But of this Jerry knew nothing. The widow, never conversational, kept her own counsel; probably never gave a thought to her charge till the back'us door let him in, and closing, shut out, beside the deep mysterious lane and grey misty twilight, all kindly warmth and homely cheerfulness for another week.

Mr. Padden had temporarily departed when he came back.

After service, he would return to enjoy the widow's hospitality. But again, of that he knew nothing. Safely tucked away in bed, his thoughts were only of the day; Mrs. Chubbe's kiss, the farmer's cheery welcome, Betty's childish chatter, and all the little Sunday treats. Betty, little glutton as she was, chose the Sunday pudding, and part of the afternoon had been spent cogitating upon that for the following week. For Jerry was to repeat the visit, and in the long dreary wilderness of days at the cottage, each Sunday stood out a green refreshing oasis.

There was no break to the monotony. From the time he was woke by the friendly movement at the window, till he lifted the cover of the bread pan at night, ages flowed by. Yet he was not unhappy; only in a state of stagnation—a small machine, knowing no emotion after that one outbreak. But though Jerry stood still seemingly, the tide of Time swept on, bringing events nearer every hour. The hands of Church Clock circled and circled and circled. The Moon's round face dwindled to a profile, grew pale and thin, then broadened out to a cheery grin. And always the two friendly countenances peeped into the little rooms.

"Still watching, Church Clock?" the Moon said each time he rose full and strong.

"Still watching, friend," Church Clock would answer.

"No news of Margery?"

"Not yet—not yet—" ticked the Clock, "but it'll come—it'll come."

"Aye—it'll come," said the Moon, "but he mustn't forget Margery."

"No, friend," answered Church Clock. "When the hush of afternoon falls, when tired little people are falling asleep, I say, 'Jerry—Margery,' and he remembers."

"And his daddy?" queried the Moon anxiously. Church Clock ticked for a few minutes, then answered quietly—

"His daddy is always with him. In his work he remembers—and I do not tell him—that work is noble. In his play,

he thinks of past hours when he had a loving playmate. The only time when he seems furthest off is after tea, for then the magic of evening falls; he cannot hear my voice, he cannot see your face, friend. In the stillness, the souls of things inanimate wake, and he sees them, though to few is given that power. But when he goes to bed, he remembers. Then he remembers most, for in sleep a corner is lifted of the curtain which hangs between this world and fairyland—so he sees the other side."

Summer passed. The nip of autumn was felt in the air, in the water at the pump. Jerry spent long mornings gathering sticks for the wood pile in the yard, for fuel was scarce and dear, and the fire in the kitchen burnt many, many sticks. Out in the woods everything was very still; only the sound of a woodcutter's axe occasionally. Not with the deep brooding silence of summer, but with an expectant stillness as though the trees listened for a footfall. Even Jerry paused sometimes in his wood gathering, wondering, and with a strange yearning to catch the beauty around him—to keep, condense, crystallise it—somehow to make it part of himself.

Thick and high and brown grew the bracken, while above, hung a canopy of crimson and russet, gold and tawny brown. Paths, under the lacy network of black branches against a pale blue sky, were deep with rustling leaves. A child's paradise. Nature folded little Jerry in her cloak, and its loneliness was like a great loneliness surrounding a smaller one. Yet Nature gives while taking away. Out in the woods, remembered things grew more vivid, and things forgotten came back with new perceptions. Old fairy tales, legends, and childish lore, retold themselves in the quiet solitude, never again to be banished, and those autumn days added another stratum to the child's already half formed mind.

Inside the cottage was another atmosphere. The great mystery of the woods became the smaller mystery created by man. That the Widow Hagges was a witch became every day more

certain to Jerry. A thousand things seemed to confirm the idea, and there was a certain fearful fascination in being a member of such a household. The Sundays spent at the inn and the daily visits of the robin were Jerry's bit of human life. With them he was again a child, though always a solemn one. The robin grew tamer and tamer; he would hop on to Jerry's bed, perch on his hand, even take crumbs from his mouth. The bread was saved at night, though each day it seemed harder, for there were times when the hunger of a growing boy made itself felt, and the widow's housekeeping was, to say the least, not lavish. Yet Jerry knew that meals were cooked of which he had no share. Sometimes, on a cold night, after he had been in bed an hour or so, there would creep up into his room a warm, savoury odour, suggesting roast meat, potatoes, gravy—all the delicious things a hungry little stomach craves for. Betty's only knowledge of hunger was a longing for almond rock, toffee, and sugary dainties.

It was tantalising, irritating, and most puzzling. The contents of the larder were well known to Jerry—only by magic could the smell be accounted for. Perhaps it was served by black imps, or perhaps it was that the goat who lived in the next field was a fairy goat, and only had to be invoked as "Little goat, my table spread," and lo! a wondrous feast would spring up. True, in the quiet of the afternoon, he had tried it himself, but with no result, for nothing happened, only Nanny turned and looked at him as though she knew all about it. Strange, mysterious, unaccountable—yet only another of the mysteries of the cottage.

As winter drew nearer, life became harder. Pump water is very cold at six o'clock in the morning; a flock mattress has few warmth-giving properties, and a garret catches most winds that blow. On no account would Jerry close his window; Robin entered by it; but one night, to his huge delight, the visitor flew in as he was dropping off to sleep and perched on the bed rail. From that time it became a regular thing, and the friendly faces peeping in, smiled at each other—the

smile of the wise for those little lives which ought to know only Pan's fairy music.

"Such a lonely little boy, Church Clock," said the Moon.

"It will pass, friend," ticked the Clock, "it will pass; but not yet. There are many weary hours—sadness, passion—to be overcome. For a child's life is made in its morning, and, to those who win through trouble and grief, life gives its reward, sooner or later, here, perchance, yet sometimes not until the curtain which hangs between each one and fairyland is lifted."

Day by day Robin grew tamer, disappearing during the day, but coming regularly every night. Jerry wondered where he lived, but it was not until nearly Christmas that he found out, and then only by Robin's own consent.

There were still sticks to be gathered. It seemed that the kitchen fire burned more and more each day. Every afternoon, when the dinner things were washed and put away, the hearth white-stoned and the kettle filled, he would slip off to the woods into the greater mystery and bigger loneliness, which yet, somehow, held no fear.

Beautiful were they in their winter dress of soft snow and sparkling frost. Quiet now—not still, nor expectant, only peaceful, for everything slept. Jerry's little feet made a gentle padding sound; sometimes a stick snapped or a mass of snow fell with a dull thud, but nothing else stirred. Sticks were hard to find, and sometimes the sun-setting would find him with only a small handful. When the crimson glow fell through the white trees, turning them rosily pink, beautiful though it was, Jerry never lingered. The lane had to be passed, and when the sun dropped below the horizon it became a place of terror, haunted by hobgoblins, witches, and Heaven knew what.

A small incident altered it all, taking the fear completely away.

One afternoon he came to that part of the lane which was dark even in broad daylight. There was a stir in the branches above, and something touched his shoulder. His heart leaped

up, then dropped, for a soft warm thing cuddled close to his face, as though in greeting, then fluttered its wings and flew upwards into the heart of a great oak, leaving Jerry entranced.

So that was Robin's home! That he was a good fairy was a double certainty, and from that moment all fear vanished. Very soon he would stay longer, even accompanying him to the woods, leaving him as they neared the cottage.

All the love in Jerry's heart flowed out to the little creature who trusted him so completely. Never for one moment did the thought of Robin leave him, and when other birds looked thin and poor, Jerry rejoiced in the fact that his pet was fat—perhaps almost too fat—sleek, and extremely pert. Bits of piecrust found their way to his pocket, cake crumbs begged from Mrs. Chubbe on Sunday; all saved for Master Robin's regalement. Betty had been told and was keenly interested.

"One day I'll bring him, Betty," promised Jerry, "when he gets a little tamer. But he mightn't like other people yet," and though Betty teased and scolded, he stood firm.

But a dark cloud was lowering; so black, so threatening, that when it fell, even goblins and imps lost their terrors; the cloud of evil through which, sooner or later, everyone must pass, either to be swallowed up in its blackness, or to emerge stronger, purer, nobler, by resistance.

It was three days before Christmas; snow had fallen for many hours, followed by sharp, windless frosts. A pale sun gleamed in a pastel blue sky, the distance was no longer purple, only a cold faint mauve. Save for the black tree trunks Nature wore her clear, low tints, and the world of green and gold was arrayed accordingly.

But the children's world was gay with glorious expectation. Betty's tongue flowed like a mill-stream—fast and unceasingly. For Jerry, it was to be like Sunday, only glorified by Christmas fare and Christmas jollities. Yet, though it takes the better part of a lifetime to realise it, it is a fact that, when the tide of life flows broad and full and merrily,

then is the time to beware of rocks beneath and sudden squalls.

On that particular morning Jerry rose with joyous anticipations. Only a few more days, and then Christmas. Gradually more and more had been put on his small shoulders. The widow, without perhaps meaning it, had found out the delight of having young feet and hands about her, and little by little, much of the odd household work had fallen to the child, who accepted it unquestioningly. Betty helped her aunt, he knew, so of course he must help. There was plenty to do, but work never frightened him, and to-day all things were easy. He kissed Robin, watched him fly through the window, and went downstairs.

"You can go into the woodyard and chop those bits that Peter brought yesterday."

Peter was one of my lord's rangers, and report said that long ago he had been an admirer of the widow, which might or might not be; anyhow, many a bundle of chips came from him, and Jerry occasionally accompanied him in his walks through the estate.

"Mind and cut it small," called the widow, as he passed the back'us window; "an' don't chop your fingers, an' keep your feet well back."

For some time Jerry chopped, till back and arms ached healthily—then stood up to view his work. Yes, there was quite a good pile—the woodstack was the highest he had seen in the village. Altogether Jerry was proud of his performance. Suddenly, there was a flutter of wings, a little sound, and the soft warm thing was on his shoulder, nestling close, and searching his mouth for crumbs.

"You dear—" whispered Jerry, putting a hand against it. "But I haven't got anything for you now."

Robin snuggled closer, and after a few minutes' rest, Jerry lifted him tenderly, kissed him, and placed him on a pile of wood well out of reach of the axe. For a time he sat there, watching with bright eyes, then began to hop merrily about.

Jerry could hear the widow's slow footsteps passing from back'us to kitchen, then back again, making an occasional detour to the room above. Presently the back'us door opened and shut, the footsteps came nearer.

Jerry paused, glancing at Robin, wondering if his secret would be discovered. There was nowhere to put him out of sight, besides, perhaps he wouldn't go. While he hesitated, the footsteps were upon him, and the widow stood by his side. She nodded approvingly, then turned and took a leisurely survey of the woodstack.

From his perch Master Robin cocked his head saucily, then spread his wings, and settled on Jerry's shoulder. The widow gazed with greedy eyes.

"That's a fine fat bird," she said. "Stand still, little boy—quite still."

Wondering, but pleased that she should be interested in his pet, Jerry obeyed, and the widow stepped cautiously nearer, put out her hand as though to stroke the soft feathers, and, in a second, while the smile was still left on the child's face, Robin—merry, saucy, loving Robin—lay in the widow's big hand, a quivering mass of feathers.

"A fat bird, and no mistake," said the widow triumphantly. "A fine tit-bit he'll make—and as you're a good little boy, you shall sit up and have some of the gravy."

Jerry stood still—every nerve, every muscle paralysed. Something horrible had been near him, something worse than witchcraft. Then, with a loud thump, his heart started throbbing. The air was dark with vague terrors, with darkness; then, as it cleared, he caught sight of the scarlet breast in a cruel hand, and everything turned blood red. Wildly he beat the air, and with a loud cry, flew at the widow. With a great jump he was on her shoulders, hitting, scratching, biting.

"My bird—my bird—give me my bird. You've killed him—you've killed him. You're wicked—you're wicked. Now I *know* you are a witch."

Too astonished for words, for a moment she stood still.

But as the blows fell, and she felt the keen stab of Jerry's sharp teeth, she, too, raised her voice.

"Help, help, murder!" The loud cry, mingling with the child's passionate sobs, carried far in the keen frosty air to the top of the lane which Peter the Ranger happened to be crossing. The unusual sound startled him; the spaniel at his heels added his bark.

"Whativer can it be?" said Peter, slowly ruminating. "'Tis widow's voice, for sure. Best go an' see." Down the lane went man and dog, into the cottage.

"Help, help, murder!" The tone was getting hoarse, and even Peter hurried his steps. Out in the yard he found them —the widow gasping for breath, Jerry on her back, still raising the pitiful passionate cry, "My bird—my bird—give me my bird," and on the ground a dead robin, with closed eyes and limp wings.

"Take him off, Peter," shrieked the widow. "He's mad—mad."

Peter, after gasping and staring, rose to the occasion, and marching into the thickest of the fray, grasped one of the kicking legs. "Now then, young master, you come along o' me."

The only answer was a violent blow from the free leg, causing him to back away and hold his face.

"There's a young devil for ye, an' *no* mistake," said he, when the sudden pain had abated. "But I'll have him, missis —never fear. Ketch his legs, while I lift him down."

The large plump hands were unaccustomed to quick movement, and after a few efforts, she gave it up. Jerry's violent passion was lessening—his blows grew weaker, the loud angry cry was subsiding. Peter slipped warily behind, and with a sudden snatch, lifted the small form to the ground, where it dropped heavily from him. The widow straightened herself, gazed in a bewildered manner at the sobbing child stretched full length before her, at the tiny dead thing, the innocent cause of the trouble, and in a vacant way at her rescuer.

"What's it all about, missis?"

She shook her head helplessly, then turned and went into the cottage, where she subsided heavily into the easy chair. Never before to her knowledge had she done such a thing in the morning, but, then, unusual events justified unusual doings. She was hopelessly bewildered, sorry for herself, and wholly unable to grasp the meaning of it all. What was a bird more or less? Had she known it was Jerry's pet, why, of course, she would not have hurt it. But he could get another; robins were plentiful enough. Where was the harm? The deeper injury was beyond her understanding. The veil which shuts out evil from childhood had been rudely torn aside, and Jerry knew vaguely that beauty, innocence, and weakness must succumb to brute strength and gross passions —that love itself is sometimes love's undoing, that death, not death in its kind and gentle aspect as he had known it, but carrying with it a fearful horror—a suggestion of things unknown—lurks near, ever ready to show its hideous side.

Peter, after a short consideration of the little figure shaking with sobs, followed the widow indoors.

"An' now, missis, let's hear the rights on it." She shook her head and gazed into the fire. Peter waited. Presently she spoke, sullenly warming her hands at the blaze.

"How should a body know 'twas the child's pet. A robin's a robin—they're all alike. An' this one—" she sat back, resting her arms on the chintz covered chair. "I tell you, Peter, 'twas the plumpest bird I ever did see—and he should have had some o' the gravy for his supper."

Thoroughly exhausted the widow sunk into a kind of doze; Peter tried again, but got no answer, and shaking his head, stole out. On the hard cobble stones, Jerry still lay; the violent cry had dropped, only long sobs came now and then, shaking the small figure from head to foot. They, too, stopped, and presently Jerry rose, stiff, cramped, heart and head alike aching. The dead bird caught him at once; but his tears were used up. Lifting the poor little body, he stole cautiously

in, and, without waking the widow, crept up to his room. Sitting by the window, he held the dead bird till the winter dusk fell, and the cold grew so intense that even sorrow had to give way to bodily necessities. He couldn't go down; to face the widow might rouse all the bitter anger again. So, quietly undressing, he slipped into bed, and, thoroughly exhausted, fell asleep.

The widow woke with a start and a remembrance of unpleasant things, to say nothing of stiffness and pain. All sorts of things were happening in the strange jumble called her mind. Among others, the fact that she had someone to look after. With a great effort and many groans she lifted herself from the chair and slowly made her way to the yard. Jerry was gone, and for a moment a fear possessed her that he had run away. Then commonsense told her to look indoors. She dragged herself up the narrow stair, very softly opened the door of the gable room, and looked in. The child was sitting quietly by the window, one little hand holding the dead bird, the other softly stroking its feathers.

Something strange and unknown seized the watcher's heart. She closed the door noiselessly, and for a moment stood waiting till the queer sensation had passed away, and the mistiness cleared from her vision. Then she made her way downstairs. She could settle to nothing for the rest of the day. Tea time came, but no Jerry, and again she toiled up the stairs, this time going right in. Jerry lay on the bed, breathing softly—yet, even as she waited, came a long quivering sob, and the widow, unconscious of its being a strange thing, bent and drew the bedclothes closer, even making a clumsy attempt at tucking up.

Ah, but Pan piped wildly that night; and fauns and satyrs danced, while fairies drew into the shadow and wept for the sorrow of things. Only the Moon and Church Clock remained the same.

"Such a lonely little boy, Church Clock," said the Moon.

"Yes—but it'll pass—it'll pass," answered Church Clock; "and there's a meaning in it all. Every sorrow, every sin, teaches its own lesson. If there were no shadow there would be no sun. Sorrow and happiness, good and evil, suffering and health, come and go, following each other, holding each other's hands, close companions, knowing that one cannot exist without the other."

Jerry woke next morning, missing the cheery sound; then, as he caught sight of the dead bird laid on his box, the tears broke out afresh, yet not wild and passionate as before. The pump invigorated him, and he plucked up heart to face the widow and eat his breakfast, which, truth to tell, was very welcome. After all, in this strange world in which we live, bodily necessities strike a very loud note. It is seldom that emotion can kill them.

There was never any conversation; that day even words were missing. Jerry went on with his work, the widow with hers, and evening came. But, strange to say, things had changed. No longer did the witch sleep, but sat bolt upright in her chair, regarding Jerry with a curious air, as though he were some unknown Lilliputian thing strayed into her domains. It was trying, more especially as it lasted. What passed in the widow's confused jumble of a mind—she alone knew. Dim remembrances of childhood, perhaps, strange thoughts of a time when youth and its emotions were all in all and food and money counted as naught. This hotch-potch crystallised on the second night. After regarding him intently for half an hour, she leaned forward and moved a plump forefinger. Jerry obeyed the call and stood by her chair.

"Little boy," she said solemnly, "did you love your bird very much?"

A rush of memory brought back all the heart burning and hatred; he moved a little further away and nodded, not trusting himself to speak.

"Well, then," she spoke slowly—conversation between her-

self and Jerry was always difficult, and this was not an easy matter—"I'm sorry I killed your bird. You see, I didn't know."

Jerry said nothing—what was there to say?—and would have gone back to his seat, but the widow held him.

"Come here," she whispered, "and see what I've got for a good little boy."

She pushed a hand down among the cushions, presently bringing up from their depths a small paper parcel, which, with many nods and creasings, she presented to Jerry. It was a trifling act, a poor gift—only two gaudily painted sugar sticks—but even to the child was apparent the deeper meaning behind. The intense hatred, the bitter loathing subsided; it might come again, but never to the same extent. The first knowledge that evil is part of all had come to Jerry, and he accepted the gift in the way it was given, as a peace offering, an outward and visible sign of something vague and elusive, yet somehow understandable. The widow's face creased and uncreased. With a wave of her hand she dismissed him, sank back on the cushions with a deep sigh of relief, and in five minutes was snoring.

Once more, when all was silent, came the awaking of things inanimate, this time like school children let loose after long imprisonment. The malicious spite was gone, giving place to cheerful winks and nods and grins, and even sometimes Jerry fancied he heard a chuckle. The fear had vanished, he was even amused, and when bedtime came he went with almost a light heart, even arranging in his own mind details of a magnificent burial, with Betty and himself as chief mourners. Such close bedfellows are tragedy and comedy.

The story spread through the village. Jerry, on Christmas day and with many tears, told Betty, and together they dug a hole, and, with much ceremonial, laid the little victim in it. Much of the joy of the day was buried too, for Jerry's loving heart was still sore for the loss of his pet, and though

the first bitterness was gone, time alone could place things on an easy footing again in the cottage.

Mrs. Chubbe watched him, asking no questions. She had heard the story only that morning, for strangely enough, or possibly because those nearest are the last to be told, it had not been related in the inn parlour, and not until the next day did the farmer hear it. Betty's restless tongue could no more keep a secret than resist a lollipop; besides, it was no secret. Boxing Day being slack, the farmer was somewhat at a loss for occupation, coming in and out continually.

As he sat drinking his glass of morning ale, his niece prattled gaily of all things in the village and out of it. He listened amused, sometimes bursting into a roar of laughter. Presently Jerry's name was brought up, and with it the events of the previous day asserted themselves. The funeral, and from that to the cause of it, was a natural sequence.

"Uncle Matt, the Widow Hagges killed Jerry's bird. Wasn't she a wicked, wicked woman?" Mrs. Chubbe looked up sharply.

"Now, then, Betty, stop talking about it."

"But she *did,* Aunt Martha," persisted the piping voice. "You know she did. The dear little bird that Jerry fed every night and morning. Uncle Matt, do you know, he knew Jerry quite well, and flew straight on to his shoulder because he thought he'd find crumbs in his mouth—because that's how Jerry fed him sometimes; and he promised he'd show me, but now he can't, because the little bird's dead. I do think she's a horrid, wicked woman."

The farmer listened gravely, finished his bread and cheese and ale, and set Betty down, telling her to go and play. When she had gone, he turned to his wife.

"Missis, is it true, what the wench says? Did she kill the little lad's bird?" Mrs. Chubbe for once looked sheepish.

"Well, yes, master, I suppose she did. But what's a bird

more or less. I'm sure there's a many of them come seed time and the fruit." The farmer answered gravely:

"Wife, there's not a sparrow that falls to the ground but He knows it. Doubtless she meant no harm, but 'twas the child's bird, and 'tis a pity, aye, a pity."

Mrs. Chubbe shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing. There were times when the farmer put down his foot, quietly but firmly, and though she would have scorned to acknowledge it, at such times his wife's respect and pride in him swelled to bursting point—almost—never quite.

"For, once tell 'em they're right," said she, "and you may give in for ever. They'd never forgit it—not the best man i' the world."

CHAPTER V

WHICH INTRODUCES A LORD, A LADY, A FAIRY GODMOTHER, A PRIEST, AND A MINISTER, AND ALSO TELLS OF A LETTER

PETER the Ranger stood at the back'us door one morning, a fine hare dangling from his hand, and called loudly. The widow, washing cups in the kitchen, Jerry wiping, answered:

"Come in, Peter," adding as he entered, "Sit ye down by the fire, an' warm yourself; it's cruel cold."

The tall figure, blocking up the doorway almost completely, took no notice of the invitation.

"Ay, 'tis that," he replied. "But it's breakin' up; there'll be little more cold weather. I've brought you a hare, missis. 'Tis almost the last we'll be shootin'. Wants keepin' a bit. I'll put it in the larder afore I come in."

The widow nodded and went on with her work. In a few moments he returned, drew the easy chair close to the fire and sat down, warming his hands in silence. The widow finished her job, emptied the water, and wiped her fingers on the towel; leisurely she drew a glass of ale, brought out bread and cheese and put them before the visitor. Peter nodded and helped himself; then took a long draught, and sitting back in his chair, untied his tongue.

"The ladies is comin' back this week." Mrs. Hagges, slowly dusting, ejaculated: "Oh!" and dusted on. "Who told ye?" she asked presently. Peter cut another slice of bread, took a deep pull, and answered curtly, "Mrs. Lovegrove." Again silence. Jerry fetched potatoes and began peeling them for dinner. Peter halted, a piece of cheese on his knife half way to his mouth, and glanced comically at him.

"Ha' ye got anither bird yet, boy?" he asked teasingly. Jerry coloured and the widow turned, quickly for her.

"Let the child alone, Peter," she said almost sharply. Peter grinned and winked to himself, shook his head knowingly, and finished the bread and cheese, then pushed his chair back, and stood up, hands behind him, warming his back at the fire.

"They say my lord's comin' too." Mrs. Hagges turned from her dusting.

"An' my Lady Mary?" Peter shook his head. "Nay, she's with her governess, in London."

"Oh!" the widow dusted again. Peter turned to Jerry, unable to resist teasing the solemn-faced child.

"Ye'll ha' to mend your manners, my lad, now Father Francis is comin'. No more fightin' an' screamin', an' such like."

Again the widow raised her voice, almost to vehemence.

"I tell you, Peter, let the child be."

"All right, missis, all right." He moved from the fire, picked up his heavy stick, and made a movement to the door.

"I'll be going now; there's a sight o' work to be done afore my lord comes. 'Tant much that he misses, an' Mrs. Lovegrove tells me the London servants say he gets harder to please every day."

"Aye," answered the widow, "my lord's had trouble."

"Trouble!" said Peter, "trouble! Afore I'd let a woman spoil my life, I'd—" he filled the gap with mysterious nods and winks, and turned to the back'us. "Well, well, time I was going. Good-day to ye, widow, an' mind you hang that hare well." The footsteps rang out across the brick floor, the back'us door opened and shut, and the routine of the day went on as before, only a new interest, perhaps the revival of an old one, had come into the village, penetrating even to the cottage in the lane.

My lord was coming—my lord, who had not visited Cloudesley, save for a few hours on a bleak December morning, for

seven years. Every one, even the children, even Jerry himself, knew the story, still told with bated breath and tearful eyes by older folk. They whispered it on Sunday morning, when all Cloudesley trooped out to catch a glimpse of the great folk, and reminded each other how, on a summer morning, more than eight years ago, my lord had brought home his beautiful girl wife, one of the many daughters of an old house as proud as the Cloudesleys themselves, though almost as penniless as the poorest tenant on the Cloudesley estate. A fine thing indeed for Margaret Thurston. She was to make her family's fortune; introduce and marry those younger sisters who looked to her as their salvation, and push brothers, who, lacking money and influence, could only drop out in the race for worldly prizes. And, knowing no other love, she was content to make the sacrifice.

Edward Cloudesley loved her—how, only those nearest to him knew—with all the strength and power of a strong, harsh nature, and with all its reticence. Though his years numbered few more than hers, in character he was her senior by twenty. Unable to descend to her level, he could not talk lightly, nor laugh merrily, nor even smile at her sweet girlishness. Coming from a home where love showed itself a thousand times a day in warm kisses and embraces, where youth sang and danced, and troubles were light as thistledown, the coldness and grandeur of Cloudesley, the lack of all responsiveness on her husband's part, told on a nature which craved for love and sunshine. What wonder that gradually the pretty rippling laughter was hushed, the merry voice silenced, and the changing, vivacious face settled to an expression of gentle gravity. The village mothers nodded at each other and smiled wisely.

"It will pass," they said, "in the spring time."

And in the spring time hope returned to Margaret Cloudesley. The child that was coming would give her her husband's love. Not the sombre, passionate thing which, all unknown to her, dwelt in the Earl's breast, but the light, airy love with

which she had always been familiar. She craved for it, for mirth and joyousness. And with young life, surely, surely, she told herself, these would come. Till then, the days dragged heavily, but in April, when the bright spring sun breathed on the earth warmth and tenderness, and promise of life to come, and the pale skies shed tears for winter's cruelty, Mary Cloudesley was born, and in her happiness the young wife forgot all harshness and cool treatment, as frost and snow are forgotten when summer comes. But frost and snow return. Just at first, my lord showed a natural affection for his wife and pride in his offspring, although there was a certain disappointment that it was not a boy.

Then came unforeseen trouble. The doctors declared that Lady Margaret was not strong enough to nurse the child. In vain she pleaded, cried, threatened. Even had they consented, my lord refused, and he had the final word. From that time my lady ceased to take much interest, and dropped back to silence.

And then Fate took the first step towards the end. A distant cousin of my lord's, only two degrees removed from the succession, came on a visit. Young, gay, chivalrous, what could my lady do but fall in love! She to whom love was life. On a snowy December night, she fled with her lover to far off sunny lands.

My lord said little—those around him feared the silence more than any violent anger—becoming, if possible, more morose, more self-centred; a mere automaton, artificial, even in an artificial age, masking every passion—and there were deep ones—under a veil of ceremonious stiffness. The great house was shut up, only the housekeeper and a few maids left, and, taking his little daughter with him, my lord left Cloudesley for London.

And my lady? Report said that he refused to give her her freedom, and that the disappointment and shame preyed upon a constitution never strong. Within a year they brought her

back and laid her in the Cloudesley vault, my lord coming down for the ceremony only. Now, after seven years, he was returning. Village gossip speculated upon the likelihood of a permanent stay, and decided against it on the whole; but that it was the beginning of better things was agreed upon by all.

The widow's intelligence was hardly sufficient to allow of much interest in her neighbour's affairs; gossip had little attraction for her, and she made hardly any comment on the news. Not so Jerry. He drew imaginary pictures, helped out by Betty's vivid descriptions, of the new comers. He knew by this time that Cloudesley and all the land around belonged to my lord. He also knew that the great iron gates, never opened in his time, led into the long avenue, white in the spring with chestnut bloom, which wound on and on, till you came to the Hall itself. He had caught glimpses of it on Sunday, for the chapel, used by the Catholic tenantry, stood at the back, and was reached by a pathway skirting the kitchen gardens, and from thence through a shrubbery. After that, a small corner of the pleasure gardens had to be crossed, and though a fence intervened, Jerry could see vast stretches of lawns, a bit of the broad marble terrace, a flight of steps leading down, and some of the great white statues which stood at intervals along the balustrading.

A fairy palace! And many were the fancies which crept into the child's brain at the sight. It was something to look for every Sunday. How he wished Mrs. Chubbe would not hurry so; if only he could be left to gaze and gaze into the enchanted grounds.

On this particular Sunday, he joined the inn party with a certain amount of excitement, for at last he was to see some of the inmates of the Palace Beautiful. My Ladies Karen and Keziah, it is true, could not actually be called inmates, as they dwelt in the Dower House, a fine old mansion situated in the grounds and surrounded by its own gardens.

The inn folk were used to the coming and going of the "gentry." They showed no excitement, only an extra admonition to the children to behave themselves and listen attentively.

"For 'tisn't Father Andrew now, 'tis Father Francis—he's comin' with my lord," said Mrs. Chubbe, tying Betty's muffatee with a vigorous jerk. "So mind you don't forget the text."

"Aye," echoed the farmer. "He'll be comin' to see you, Jerry lad; Father Francis don't let the grass grow under his feet."

Jerry's heart quailed. He liked Father Andrew, the fat, cheery little priest who came over from Channington to take duty for Father Francis, my lord's chaplain, when he was in London. It is true that during his reign the village was apt to grow slack in its religious observances, for, as Father Andrew said, "he couldn't be in two places at once," and Channington needed all it could get in the way of spiritual and bodily help. Besides which, to get over once a week during the winter weather meant much; it was impossible to do so twice. So, for some months, if my lord needed his chaplain, Cloudesley went without clerical comfort, and to all appearance, was little the worse.

The congregation seemed conscious of a tighter hand over them than usual. There was no whispering; even the children fidgeted less, and the grown-ups sat straight and prim as though never in their lives had an impulse to nod during the sermon overtaken them.

Jerry kept his eyes fixed on the great oaken pew, white cushioned, with a white padded shelf in front. Once in, the ladies would be lost to sight, and he had no intention of missing their entry. A glance at the gallery, which ran along the western end and was reserved for the servants, told him that Mrs. Lovegrove and the few maids left at the Hall, were there, and he caught a glimpse of new faces.

But the survey was short. "Don't turn round in church,"

came Mrs. Chubbe's warning, and again he fixed his eyes on the pew.

There was an almost imperceptible stir in the congregation. The little door leading from the Hall to the chapel opened softly, and two ladies entered, making their way across. Lady Karen led the way, stately and tall, proud and haughty. Behind her came my Lady Kezzy, short and plump, with a fair, comely face, and a pretty bloom, in spite of her forty odd years and hair streaked with grey, now neatly banded back under the great bonnet. Both ladies wore stiff flowered silk dresses and rich furs, and, as they passed, Jerry caught a whiff of sweetness. Betty was prepared. At the first sound of the opening of the door, she sat with distended nostrils, ready to take in the full delight of it.

"The ladies always have sweet stuff on their pocket handkerchiefs," she whispered. "Isn't it lovely, Jerry? When I'm grown up, I shall put it on all my clothes."

Mrs. Chubbe frowned and uttered a loud, though somewhat abstracted, "Sh—sh—sh." The ladies were familiar figures enough, but the tall figure following his sisters rivetted all eyes. Little altered was my lord the villagers said, when comparing notes; more lined, sterner if possible, and the beard and long side whiskers were iron grey instead of dark. There was a sigh of relaxed tension as the door of the pew shut with a click, and its inmates were lost to view. A moment after, Father Francis entered, and the service began. To Jerry it was always a pleasure. The beautiful words—familiar, and perhaps understood as well as the prayers of the Established Church are understood by a child—the sweet music, the flickering light and flowers, carried him into a world of his own. To-day there was an added interest, for with my lord came his friend Count de Cosse, whose father was a refugee when France went through the time of her madness. He owned Grey Towers, an old mansion of grey stone—hence the name—about a mile distant, and was in all but appearance and name an English gentleman.

He sat on the opposite side of the chancel, accompanied by his son, a child of Jerry's age, and, for the first time since Margery left him, the boy was conscious of clothes past their first freshness, and of hands stained and grimed with toil. Old words of daddy's came back, bringing a rush of tears to his eyes and a pain to his heart.

"Keep yourself clean and neat, Jerry boy. Remember, you're a gentleman, and gentlemen are always particular."

So, remembering, he resolved that if his clothes were not so fine, he could at least be as clean as the little pale-faced boy, who sat in the great pew like a very small kernel in a very large nut, and stared at Betty as though he would like to know and play with her.

But not for long did his thoughts wander; he was conscious all the time of a tall thin figure, a pair of keen eyes which saw everything, might even know what was going on inside a little boy's mind. The voice, too, attracted him. Not strident, not piercing, not full nor low, but a mixture, to which was added a resonance which thrilled and thrilled till Jerry felt as though it went straight through him. Betty, too, for a time, was unusually attentive; but long before the end, Mrs. Chubbe had to frown severely and administer sundry taps as a foretaste of what might come after.

It came to an end at last. The door of the pew opened and the ladies came out. Lady Karen with her head held high and her eyes looking straight before her, Lady Kezzy casting a wistful glance at the benches, as though she would have liked a little chat and gossip with their occupants. But she followed her sister, the small door closed behind them, and with a stir of relief, the congregation prepared to go home. Quick as they were, Father Francis was quicker. Clad in his long, black cassock, he stood at the door of the chapel shaking hands and exchanging a few words with each parishioner. As the little party came along, he put out an arresting hand.

"Wait, I have something to say."

The farmer touched his hat and walked slowly on, halt-

ing at intervals to see if it was time to turn back. When the last greeting was over, the priest ran lightly down the steps and joined him. After a few friendly inquiries his tone changed; he turned to the farmer.

"Now, Chubbe, what's this I hear about the child? How came he to go to Mrs. Hagges, a Protestant, nay, more, a Methodist? Who sent him?"

"His old nurse, your Reverence, did most of the business. The father was too ill." The priest nodded.

"I know." The voice was quick, yet each word clear and sharp. "I saw him once or twice before I left. A Catholic, though not perhaps as strict as one would like. He was buried, of course, with the full rites of the Church?" The voice had a note of concerned inquiry.

"Yes, your Reverence; Father Andrew was very good."

"No doubt—no doubt. Well, well—about the child. He is paid for, I understand."

Mrs. Chubbe, waiting her opportunity, chimed in.

"Aye, Father, he's paid for right enough; widow isn't one to give, even if she had it, which she hasn't. 'Tisn't much, for I asked her; Mrs. Marvin wasn't one to talk of her affairs. A pound a month she's getting, an' she'll save on't. The child don't eat that much, an' he's a good lad—quiet an' well behaved. I'd have had him, an' been thankful, but she settled things."

The priest looked grave, even stern. "Yes, it's a pity, Mrs. Chubbe. Knowing the circumstances, you should have insisted—or written to me; I would have made arrangements. As it is, I can do nothing; it must go now. I hear the nurse returns in a year?"

"Yes, your Reverence." It was the farmer who answered; his wife wore an air of injured dignity. Too much in awe of the priest to make excuses, she felt herself unjustly accused. That Jerry was with the widow was none of her doing.

Father Francis stopped, beckoned the children, and lifted

his hand in benediction. Betty and her mother curtseyed, the farmer and Jerry stood bareheaded; then, with a sigh of relief, resumed their way, Mrs. Chubbe's tongue, let loose, commenting tartly on the priest's words.

It was on the Tuesday that Jerry was called in by the widow, and found the tall thin figure standing by the fireside.

It was a short visit; he was put through his catechism, told to be a good boy, and after a short but courteous conversation with Mrs. Hagges, the priest departed.

A visitor was a *rara avis,* and the excitement lasted the rest of the week; then something came along which put Father Francis, the ladies at the Dower House, even Betty, out of his mind. It was on the Sunday evening, as he started for home, that Mrs. Chubbe suddenly called to him.

"Stop a bit, child. There's a something I've got for you." Jerry turned back willingly to the bright warm kitchen. Presently Mrs. Chubbe returned.

"There," she thrust a heavy packet into his arms. "You can look at it when you get back; don't stop now. Turning out a cupboard I came across it, an' thought you'd like to have it, maybe. Now hurry, child; you'll be late."

Jerry ran off, hugging his parcel and wondering what it contained. It was shapeless, and as he held it, had a soft feel about it, unlike anything he could think of, yet with a strange unaccountable familiarity. Once in his little room he hastened to undo it. Off with the string, off with the paper, and the contents were revealed, bringing back with a rush, memories, visions, loved faces grown dim in a childish mind with the passing of months.

It was only a lump of modelling clay, such as daddy had used, and which had been almost part and parcel of his life. The new era had completely obliterated for the time much of the old occupations, and the modelling clay had been forgotten as a child forgets one thing in the contemplation of another.

But now, mechanically his fingers fell into the old familiar

handling. Former interest came back with renewed zest, and before getting into bed he had made a rough model of Robin to show Betty.

That piece of clay filled a gap in the child's life. In the long afternoons when work was done and time hung heavily, his little fingers worked and moulded the plastic stuff, finding new delights in form and likeness. Everything, Tibbie the cat, the old sow in the sty, even the widow herself made "copy." Betty was enchanted with the new pastime.

"Let me try, Jerry," was her first comment, and Jerry willingly gave up his prize, but the quick restless fingers had no power over the clay, and presently she threw it away pettishly.

"It's silly stuff, Jerry," she cried. "Don't let's have it; you can do it when I'm not here." But when he showed the widow's effigy, Betty's delight knew no bounds. There certainly was a little likeness, enough to catch the uncritical eye of childhood. She hopped round on one foot.

"Do me, Jerry. Do me—do me—do me—" And vain little puss as she was, there was no restlessness as Jerry's patient fingers set to work to reproduce the small face, irregular provoking features, and thick curling masses of hair that crowned them.

Winter passed. Jerry's chapped and chilblained hands regained their ordinary size, and the garret lost the feeling of an ice well. Margery and Daddy had been gone six months; it might have been six years, so long did it seem. But there would be a letter soon. Day by day he looked for it; Sunday after Sunday, Mrs. Chubbe put the same question.

"Have you got news yet, child, of Mrs. Marvin?"

Early in March it came, and Jerry stood, to all appearance quietly, yet inwardly all eager impatience, by the widow's side, as she slowly undid the cover and drew forth the precious sheets. But an unforeseen difficulty arose. In the widow's young days education had been little thought of. She could read print, slowly to be sure, yet enough for ordi-

nary purposes. Handwriting was beyond her, and though she shook her head solemnly many times, the fact remained that the letter must stay unread till someone turned up with a knowledge greater than that of the inmates of the cottage.

On Sunday Jerry ventured to suggest that Mrs. Chubbe was a bit of a scholar, but the widow refused, vehemently for her, to let it go out of her hands.

"Who knows, child, you'd be droppin' it or losin' it, an' then wher'd we be? Bide quiet a bit; I'll get it read."

"But Mrs. Chubbe will ask me," urged Jerry.

"Then you can say that Mrs. Marvin's well, an' sends her love, an' is comin' back in a year."

There was nothing for it but to obey. Secretly Jerry determined that he would not give the widow's version. What he would do was undetermined when he set out, but circumstances, such as a passionate outburst from Betty on the subject of clothes, a rainy morning, which generally upset Mrs. Chubbe's temper, and the spoiling of the dinner by a careless kitchen wench, took away all interest in other matters, and Jerry went unquestioned.

Truth to tell, the widow was perturbed in her mind. Like many ignorant people when doing wrong, she had not looked forward nor provided for contingencies. The letter might contain an allusion to the money paid, might even mention the sum, and she foresaw not only one difficulty, but many. To keep the contents secret was impossible; a third person was bound to know them, and for some time, as she went about her work, her face wore a worried expression. It was not until the dinner was set going, and she had tidied herself for the Sunday visitor, that the solution, really so simple, dawned upon her. Mr. Padden, of course, a scholar who could read writing as easy as shelling peas. To be sure, should the money be mentioned, he must know, but—the widow nodded and winked to herself—there were wheels within wheels. It might be to Mr. Padden's interest to keep silent. If nothing was said, the letter could be common property.

All things considered, Mrs. Hagges felt that the fates were kind. She dished the dinner with a light heart—the boiled batter pudding, light and yellow, with thick gravy; a small piece of beef, Sunday's treat, with cabbages and potatoes from her own garden; then peeped into a saucepan, boiling on the crane, at the rhubarb pudding, whose basin protested and fought violently with the bubbling, boiling water.

On the stroke of half-past twelve the minister arrived. He was a tall man, wearing shiny broadcloth and a soft hat. Thin, almost to emaciation, with that curious air of an inward fire burning which marks the fanatic—more especially the type common at the beginning of the 19th century, the man of no education, of low birth, who, suddenly finding through nonconformity a path opened to power and authority, developed fanaticism, a fanaticism which, in not a few cases, led to something more dangerous, even to madness.

He stooped, not with the gentle curve which marks the scholar, but rather from inertness, or possibly, constitutional weakness. It was doubtless from the same cause that his face was pale, almost to ghastliness, but on one side, half covering his cheek and stretching up to the forehead, was a patch known by the village as a "strawberry mark," which at times was indistinct, but, when its owner was agitated or excited, would glow a deep purple red, giving an appearance almost sinister in comparison with the pallor of the other side. His hair, dark and straight and thick as a door mat, was worn rather long on the shoulders. Contrary to custom, when cravats and stocks clothed nearly all male necks, he affected a low collar, which, combined with the long hair, gave him a dishevelled look. His gestures were wild, and a pair of dark eyes were the only redeeming point in a somewhat unpleasant personality. But each eye makes its own beauty; to the widow, Mr. Padden was a god come upon earth, and the Sunday was to her perhaps even more than it was to Jerry.

For six months now she had played hostess once a week;

previous to that the minister had lodged with George Bray, who kept the village shop. His daughter, Hester, a fine, handsome girl of twenty, had done for the two men; gossip said that, among her many admirers, the minister stood first. But the minister's income was small, his wants many. Hester, too, had dreams of something better than the small dark shop, and the monotonous tasks of cleaning and cooking, only varied by measuring off with a yard rule, lengths of calico, or serving tallow dips and parcels of groceries. Like many another, each wanted to eat the cake and have it—a thing seemingly impossible, yet which can occasionally be managed. Hester took the first step by suddenly announcing that she was going to marry Roger Dyke, thatcher to Cloudesley and the neighbouring villages. A man thirty years her senior, he was able to give her a lift towards the things she longed for.

After she had gone, her father, with the assistance of an elderly woman who came in the mornings, looked after his lodger; but the charm of a woman's presence was missing, and when the widow threw out hints of loneliness and enough for two, the minister leaped to the bait, matters adjusted themselves, and Sunday became a red letter day in the widow's week.

He entered by the front way—only used on special occasions. The widow, behind the door, curtseyed as she opened it, divided between reverence for one so lately come from the pulpit and the familiarity of many dinners. The minister still wore the expression affected by one in authority—stern, yet benign, lofty, rapt, yet ever ready to decline to the wants of his flock. As he took the widow's hand in his the look changed to one of pastoral friendship, and he gazed upon her with what was meant for Christian charity. Whether the widow was deceived, was a question.

"I trust I see you well, dear friend?" Again the widow curtseyed; it took a few minutes to establish familiarity.

"Thank you, yes," she replied in her most superior tone, "I'm as well as can be expected."

"That's good, friend." He hung his hat on the peg beside Jerry's everyday one, and rubbed his hands as he inhaled the pleasant combination of cooking and warmth drifting from the kitchen. The widow opened the door of the front room.

"Go in, minister, and rest yourself; you'll be tired with the preaching." Mr. Padden inclined his head graciously, stepped in, and taking a seat in the low chair by the fire, rested his elbows on his knees, joining the tips of his fingers together with a look of proud yet humble retrospection.

"Aye, the flesh truly is weak; yet what matter, if, from the fountain of our belief, we can refresh strangers. If we can give of our store to the poor and needy—if, in the bottomless well of love, sparkling, clear, yet never lessening, ever the same, we can plunge our weak souls, emerging fresh, unstained, cleansed from every iniquity."

He had risen during this speech, turning up his eyes, throwing his arms in wild gestures, intoxicated with the passion of words and the rolling sentences. The widow, moving softly round the table, listened abstractedly, shook her head, groaned in the most approved way of the congregation, and threw in an occasional "Surely, surely," while she adjusted knives and forks, smoothed salt in the silver salt cellars—heirlooms, only brought out in company with the best china—and gazed with a housewifely eye on the dinner table.

The minister subsided, exhausted, into the easy chair, closed his eyes and held his forehead, while his hostess took the opportunity to slip out and bring in the batter pudding. Her visitor roused himself and took the seat opposite with smiling ease.

"Kindly ask a blessing, Mr. Padden," said the widow.

He pushed the chair back, rose, closed his eyes, flung back his hair, lifted one hand, and plunged into the long address which, at that time, preceded and followed every nonconformist meal. The widow sighed in unison, her thoughts wandering to the batter pudding under the cover, which was rapidly losing its plump roundness and steaming heat.

The discourse came to an end with a long drawn "A-a-men," and the dinner proceeded in unbroken silence, except for the widow's hospitable remarks and a few complimentary comments from the visitor. The atmosphere of piety passed, and the minister became much as other men, save for an occasional lapse into rhapsody. Mrs. Hagges cleared away, washed up, tidied the kitchen grate, and hung the kettle on for tea. Then washed herself, and, taking the letter from a drawer, returned to the sitting-room. The minister, slumbering peacefully by the fireside, woke up at her entrance.

"Sit ye down, dear friend. You'll be weary with your hospitable duties." The widow obeyed. Sunday was a tiring day, but it had its compensations. She plunged into her subject.

"I've had a letter, minister, from the child's nurse, Mrs. Marvin, in Canada. I thought maybe you'd kindly read it for me."

"Surely, surely will I," replied the minister, and he meant it, curiosity being not the least of his passions. He took the letter, spread it out with an air of superior wisdom, glanced casually over the sheets, hummed, ha'd, cleared his throat, and finally leaning back in the chair, began to read.

"My dear, dear little Master Jerry.

"George, that's my sister's husband, is writing down just what I tell him. We hope you're well and hearty, as this leaves us, though once I get back to dear old England, wild horses shan't drag me over the water again. We were very ill, the journey after we landed being worse than the voyage; for we had to go for many days in a cart, and there were Indians and wild animals, and every night I thought would be my last. It took us some weeks, and when you'll have this letter I'm sure I don't know.

"Well, my dearie, I hope you're quite well, and don't forget old Margie and all she taught you; and say your prayers every night and morning. Give my best respects

to Mrs. Chubbe and all the folks at the inn. Mrs. Hagges, if you read this letter to the child, I hope you get the money all right, and please see that his little clothes are well aired, and don't let him take off his warm things till May be turned. And please, Mrs. Hagges, will you see that he gets some schooling—there's money enough, I think—it's cheap, or he'll be forgetting all his learning. And now, my dearie, I must finish. It won't be long now afore I come back, and we'll be so happy, Master Jerry, my lamb. And so I remain.

"Your affectionate old nurse,

"MARGIE."

There were crosses underneath which meant kisses, but of these the widow took no notice. The letter was sufficiently non-committal, except the bit about the schooling. The minister folded the paper and handed it back thoughtfully.

"It is a charge, dear friend, doubtless a blessed one, but children are children, even the best, and demand much care. Yet there are compensations; their sweet friendship and clinging trust, not to speak of pecuniary gratitude, which in this child's case, no doubt, is ample.".

He stole a glance as he uttered the last words, but the widow was not to be caught.

"True, true," she murmured. The minister tried again.

"In the matter of schooling, of which she speaks, Father Francis, a man of education, would advise you more completely than I, who am but a humble disciple, self-taught, yet perhaps in some ways equal, I will not say superior, to a priest of the Scarlet Woman." The subject was a favourite for ranting rhapsody. Like many of the early nonconformists, he held a strong antagonism to the Established Church—still more to the Church of Rome. His voice rose, the thin hands gesticulated.

"Of anti-Christ," he went on, "who sits in Peter's chair, and holds the keys of hell in his hands, stained by the blood of martyrs. But the keys of Heaven, we—" he stood up,

and slapped his thin chest till it echoed with a hollow sound, "we—who have cut ourselves adrift from a corrupt and vicious church, who have built a fold for the lost sheep of Israel, hold in our hands. And now we stretch out our arms," he suited the action to the words, advancing upon the widow, who gave a little shriek and retreated—"and say 'Come, come to the Bridegroom's Supper, all ye that do hunger or thirst—for ours is the true fold.' And the day dawns when anti-Christ shall be hurled from his pinnacle, and the Scarlet Woman dragged through the dust, her beauty despoiled, her gorgeous robes torn and defiled. Her priests and ministers shall fall with her, and Babylon, Great Babylon, shall be destroyed."

The widow stared open-mouthed; she was used to these tirades, but they never palled. The long words and highly coloured metaphors, though she had not the slightest idea of their meaning, impressed her greatly, and her heart swelled with pride that to her had fallen the honour and privilege of being sole listener to such wonderful sayings. It was like being the only one at chapel.

The minister sank back in his chair exhausted, but by no means at an end. "And so, dear friend, we return to our first thoughts—the choice of an adviser for the child."

The widow shook her head doubtfully. "I'm none so sure that I shall want an adviser," she said, "the child's fully young, an' the money—" the listener pricked up his ears, "whatever Mrs. Marvin may say—is none too much. A grown' lad's food costs somethin', an' then there's his clothes—he'll be wantin' more soon—an' his washing, let alone the care an' anxiety."

During this speech—long for the widow, and uttered slowly—the minister inclined his head gravely several times, opening and shutting the tips of his fingers, and closing his eyes as though in rapt attention.

"Ay, surely—" he repeated at the end, "though to Mrs. Marvin, who has been in service so long, and perchance has

forgotten the cost of a house, the sum may seem fully adequate."

"That's as may be," replied the widow, somewhat tartly. She had no intention of letting the real amount leak out, and conscience forbade a lie to the minister. "But anyway I'll bide a bit, till spring's past. And now, minister," she rose stiffly, "you'll be glad of your tea."

The minister smiled a meek assent, inwardly wondering what the sum really was. Report said a pound, but some years' knowledge of his hostess told him differently. Moreover, whatever it might be, he knew it to be considerably more than enough. The widow, unintelligent as she was to all appearance, had the wisdom of the children of this world, and could strike a bargain with the sharpest.

He dropped the subject for the present, trusting to chance and his own diplomacy to bring it up again more effectually.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOOSE-GIRL, THE SWINEHERD, A FAIRY GODMOTHER, AND A KNIGHT

THERE is a period in the lives of all young things when Nature seems to watch and brood, as though wondering in which particular niche she will place them—a period of arrested life seemingly—in which the chrysalis in the cocoon, the little brown seed in the earth, the child in its monotony of days and nights, alike share. Yet, what we call stagnation is in reality inward growth. One day the chrysalis bursts its cocoon, emerging in fuller beauty, the seed breaks through to outward expansion, the child, slowest growth of all, awakes dimly to a knowledge of good and evil.

Little Jerry's sleeping time was over. The veil, so misty, so fine, once torn, can never be replaced. The child's mind, fed by his father on song, story, romance, and legend, was breaking its bonds, and, through a dim haze, life's many paths spread themselves before him. It remained only for the small feet to choose. Though happier children might be set in the way by their elders, even accompanied along many miles, yet the child must find its own goal in the end—only, perhaps, the time of inward growth may be influenced by its surroundings.

In the iron grip of winter the little village of Cloudesley lay a prisoner. Icebound were the rippling brooks and sparkling springs; white, white, like winding sheets, the green meadows round; black and shining the wide street where the snow was swept. Drifts, shoulder high, lay in the lanes, in lonely roads, in the little garden, and oh! the water at the pump was cold.

Summer's beauty, Autumn's melancholy, Winter's cruelty, Jerry had known; but Spring is love and gentleness, and glorious hope. Jerry heard her coming—it is the harp's finer strings which respond first. Far, far away came the tinkling of water running free, the stir of life waking in woods and lanes; overhead the clear, grey sky was changing to palest blue, and stinging east winds had a touch of soft dampness. Spring came flying with winged feet that year. Winter fled before her with equal pace; Nature raised herself in answer, trees budded, and passions and thoughts roused, and grew apace. The spirit of mischief, too, was abroad and dwelt in Betty. Mrs. Chubbe declared she could do nothing, and called a consultation with her husband, a means only resorted to in extremes.

"The child's getting past me, master, an' I haven't the time to be dancing after her all day long. She's that mischievous. This morning she unscrewed the spigot from the bunghole, an' would ha' wasted a cask o' ale, only Sally heard it runnin'. Yesterday she pulled over a basin o' scalding lard —might ha' killed herself, but it missed her arms and shoulders, an' only spoilt a clean dress an' pinny. Then she poked a stick into the beehives. 'Because it's time they woke up an' worked,' says she. 'You go along an' do some yoursel',' says I, 'an' leave the bees alone. Lucky they didn't sting you to death, only they're sleepy this time o' the year.' Oh, there's no keepin' even with her. Yes, you can laugh," she added angrily, as the farmer chuckled with merriment at the recital of Betty's wrongdoings. "You'd laugh t'other side o' your face if you had the mindin' of her. An' she don't care for anyone; I've sent her to bed, an' whipped her, and starved her, but it don't make one atom o' difference—directly it's over, she's as bad as ever."

"Well, missis, what's to be done?" asked the farmer, wiping his eyes and striving to conceal his amusement.

"She'll have to go to the dame school. Mrs. Moss'll teach her, an' keep her quiet. She'll be out o' harm's way, an' I'll

have some peace, which there never will be as long as she's free to go seeking mischief."

The farmer nodded approval. The same idea had entered his head, but he had kept it to himself. "If you want a pig to go to market, you must drive him home'ards, an' wimmen's the same—contrary minded." But to save his life he could not disguise a slight chuckle. Mrs. Chubbe looked sharply at him, changing the needles of her stockings as she did so.

"Ah, you think yourself mighty clever, I've no doubt; but you'd ha' been cleverer if you'd ha' kept a still tongue. I know what you're after; you've been thinkin' the same thing as me, but you'd rather it came from me. I know." Mrs. Chubbe nodded her head wisely, and her husband gave another amused chuckle, making no denial.

His wife did not let grass grow under her feet. The following Monday was fixed for Betty's entry into the world of letters, and Sunday was devoted to discussion. Jerry was informed on his arrival, but the true pow-wow didn't come till the afternoon. Jerry listened somewhat wistfully.

"I wish I was going, Betty."

"So do I, Jerry. But I'll teach you all I learn; you'll like that, won't you? You see," she added wisely, "I'm going because I'm naughty. Somehow—" she gave a sigh, "I can't help it. Aunt Martha says, 'Think, Betty,' but I can't think till afterwards—I wish I could. But you're always good, Jerry. Uncle Matt says so."

Jerry sat thoughtfully silent. "I suppose it's because I'm a quiet little boy; Mrs. Hagges says I am, but sometimes I feel very, very naughty inside."

"I don't," said Betty naïvely. "I feel sorry—a little—afterwards. But I don't feel *really* naughty—only I can't help doing naughty things." Jerry shook his head; such logic was beyond him. Presently he spoke again.

"You know, Betty, there's two things I want. I want to learn to read and write, because I want to write to Margie.

And I want to work and earn money, because when I'm grown up, I want to be a gentleman, and that's what I want more than all the rest." Betty stared.

"You can't be a gentleman, Jerry. Look at your clothes. And you haven't got a beautiful house, and a garden, and servants, and—and—" Jerry interrupted her—

"My daddy didn't have those things, but my daddy was a gentleman." Betty was silent for a time. Presently she broke out again.

"The little count's a gentleman; but you can't be like him, Jerry, and he doesn't do any work." Jerry shook his head.

"I can't help it, Betty. I'm going to be a gentleman, and a gentleman's got to have some money, so I must work. Tom Datchett's got hired to Farmer Greatley, and he's not turned seven yet, and I was eight ever so long ago."

Betty looked approvingly at the square shoulders and solid little frame beside her—not so very tall, perhaps, but giving promise, to an older observer, of future breadth and height.

"Aunt Martha says you're well-grown, Jerry—that means big for your age, 'cos I asked Uncle Matt."

"An' that's why I want to go to service. Betty—" his tone was eager. "Do you think Mr. Chubbe wants a boy? Do you think he'd take me?" Betty put her head on one side and looked sagacious.

"I don't know, Jerry." Then, fired to interest, "Let's go an' ask him."

Mr. Chubbe was found wandering round the yard, where, only a few months ago, stood stack after stack, like yellow beehives. The heavy Sunday dinner took some time to work off; but now the farmer had had his forty winks and was ready for anything.

"Hello, children," he cried, as the two came through the propped-back gate. Betty ran to him and slipped her hand into his, while Jerry stood at his side.

"Uncle Matt," she cried, "Jerry wants to get some work,

because he wants to get some money and be a gentleman, and do you think you want a boy?"

"Hey, hey," cried the farmer, vastly amused, "wants some work, an' wants to be a gentleman. Ye can't do both, my lad. Gentlemen don't work."

"Jerry says they do, Uncle Matt; Jerry's daddy was a gentleman, and he worked." The farmer looked puzzled and serious.

"Ay, he was a gentleman all right; but what he did wasn't, so to speak, work. Seemed more like play."

"Mr. Chubbe," Jerry's quiet little voice broke in, "do you think you'll be wanting a boy soon—'cos if you do, will you take me? I'd be very good, and do what you tell me." The farmer's face grew very soft as he looked down into the serious brown eyes.

"I ain't afraid you wouldn't be good, laddie," he said, "but as to a boy—well, just now, there isn't much work for such a little 'un."

"But if you *should* want one, Mr. Chubbe—if you should?"

"Well, well, we'll think it over," replied the farmer good-naturedly. "Betty, lass, go wipe your shoes. You've been in the drift-yard, an' your aunt will scold if she sees such dirty feet." Betty looked down ruefully at the spattered white socks, and slippers thick with spring mud.

"I'll get it off, Betty, with a piece of wood," said Jerry, and the two children went off, the farmer gazing after them with a gentle look.

"Wants to do some work. Ay, it's the spring time. Poor little laddie." Jerry's request lay at the bottom of the farmer's mind. Unconsciously he turned it over and over, so that when a suggestion came from Mrs. Chubbe it found him partly prepared. There was little time for private talk between the two. Work separated them during the day; at meal times the presence of men and maids barred conversation; and in the evening, Mr. Chubbe was busy in the snug parlour, ministering

to the wants of customers. Only in the quiet of their own room could personal matters be discussed.

Betty had been to school three days. Had mastered the difference between B and D, had discovered that Q had a tail, and O had none, and learned that there was a strange letter called "crinkle crankle S." Also, she had a ruled slate, on which she made scratchy noises and evolved queer figures, called pothooks and hangers. Her aunt smiled approval; the scheme worked, for the moment at least. But after finishing her task of sewing in the afternoon, Betty was left to her own devices. The confinement of the morning, and the hour of sitting on a high stool, pushing a sticky needle through a very grubby duster, kept every nerve at high tension, the consequence being, that in three afternoons she contrived to get through as much mischief as had served for a week hitherto. Mrs. Chubbe was nearly beside herself.

"Something'll have to be done," she said to her husband. "She fell in the brook this afternoon, an' got wet through to her skin. Perhaps she couldn't help it, anyway I changed her clothes, every stitch, an' within an hour, if she didn't tip the tub of pigwash over her—hair an' all—an' a pretty picter she looked. Drip—drip—drip—all the way to the house, an' over the back'us bricks, just new scrubbed, an' would have come into the kitchen, only Sally caught her. She beats all I ever did see for naughtiness." The farmer, slowly divesting himself of his clothes, left off to scratch his head—this being an inducement to thought.

"She's young, wife."

"Young," echoed Mrs. Chubbe, "yes, she's young. So's the boy; but when do you find him in mischief? I wish to goodness that silly woman had left him here; I'd have trusted Betty with him."

"Yes, he's a good lad." The farmer slowly ruminated; then stooped, and, continuing operations, began to take off his heavy boots. "He's taken it into his little head that it's time he went to work," he said, after a long pause.

"Work!" Mrs. Chubbe stopped in the midst of brushing her hair. "Work! what sort of work?"

"Well, he thought I might be wantin' a boy, an' asked if I'd take him on." The farmer smiled broadly at the recollection. "An', I'm thinkin' that p'raps I'll be wantin' a boy."

"But you can't take that child, master." Mrs. Chubbe turned and stared in blank amazement.

"Why not?"

"Why not? Well, he's such a child."

"Tom Datchett's a year younger."

"Tom Datchett!" echoed his wife. "Tom Datchett!" she repeated contemptuously, "who's Tom Datchett? But this child's father was a gentleman, and you mark my words, if he's got any friends, they're gentlefolk."

"Maybe—maybe." The farmer lifted himself, with a very red face, kicked off his boots, and proceeded to the next operation. "But even gentlefolk can't live on nothin'. The child's right, wife, an' if he wants it, to work he shall go. I'll give him fourpence a week to scare the crows—they're thick as blackberries this spring—an' we'll see what he does with it."

Mrs. Chubbe made no answer; she was turning over an idea. Before going to sleep she got it off her mind.

"Matthew." The farmer woke up at the unusual appellation; it meant things were serious. "I've been thinking. There's those geese, runnin' wild, an' we'll be losin' some—to say nothin' of the turkeys, which are the plague of my life. There's Betty at loose ends all the afternoon. She can do her seam after tea. How'd it be if she took care of 'em, along o' the boy. 'Twould be a load off my mind, for he'd keep her out of mischief, an' she'll do it if I tell her. I'll give her a penny a week. 'Twill be a cheap penn'orth," she added with a grim smile. The farmer, broad awake now, considered for a bit.

"I think you've hit it, wife," he said slowly. "The children are best together."

"An' the sooner it's settled, the better," responded Mrs.

Chubbe, adding sleepily, as she turned over, "I'll go down an' see widow Hagges to-morrow."

So, to Jerry's unspeakable delight, and Betty's not so unspeakable, the matter was broached and clinched, and a start was to be made on the following Monday. Not even Mrs. Chubbe's practical mind could divest itself enough from superstition to engage a new hand on Friday, and Saturday was no day at all. The widow demurred slightly—mostly at the thought of money earned and kept by Jerry.

"A pound a month's none too much for a growing lad, m'am," she said, "an' fourpence's a lot o' money for a child to have of his own."

Mrs. Chubbe inwardly agreed. It was a large sum, and even Jerry was not entirely free from childish weaknesses. Betty's penny, she knew, would never have time to burn a hole in her pocket. In the end, a compromise settled things; the fourpence was to be equally divided.

"He eats a sight o' sugar," said the widow. "It'll go a little way towards paying for it."

From the Monday life changed to Jerry. He was a wage-earning member of society, and very important was he, as he sat knocking his clappers together whenever a black speck appeared on the horizon. It would have been lonely to an ordinary child, but to Jerry, used to being by himself, it was simply natural, and, like all outdoor workers, he grew unconsciously day by day more in touch with Nature, knowing, without knowing, her secrets, which are no secrets at all, and finding every hour something new, something changing.

Besides this, there was the thought of how he should spend his fortune. He wanted to buy things for everyone. There was Mrs. Chubbe—he knew she wanted a new churn. The farmer, too, had been heard to express a desire for a scarlet waistcoat. Sally wanted a new ribbon, and Nanny's one wish in the world was to possess a hymn book. Not that she could read it, but to carry it backwards and forwards on Sunday seemed to her the acme of bliss. The widow? Jerry knitted

his small brows. She didn't seem to want much; her imagination was limited to a new front "when pedlar comes." But Betty? Jerry's face cleared. Betty wanted everything. Never a day, hardly an hour, but she expressed a longing, now for lollipops, now for new shoes, ribbons, stuff like the ladies used to make you smell nice, smart clothes, a muff and tippet—there was no end to Betty's wants. Jerry shook his head; twopence a week wouldn't get all Betty wanted, he was sure. How far it would go was another question. Altogether time went quite quickly. Moreover, there was always the lump of modelling clay.

Betty's promise resolved itself into nothing. Jerry begged her to teach him what she learned, but alas! the alphabet, which he knew, took many weeks to master, and in the meantime, an incident occurred. For some time the geese and turkeys were not allowed to wander beyond the common, and Betty was under constant supervision, as the inn fronted on to the green, and from any window Mrs. Chubbe could suddenly overlook, if necessity arose. But necessity did not arise. The child's sense of honour and responsibility was waking, and for some weeks her aunt declared that she was "as good as gold," and took much credit to herself. As summer neared and small creatures grew larger, a longer tether was needed, and many an afternoon Jerry found himself called from his crow-scaring to help Betty "tend the geese." Then, indeed, came delightful hours. The two children, surrounded by the snow-white geese and mottled turkeys, wandered through lanes—hay fields being forbidden at this time—where wild roses and honeysuckle grew thick on high, high hedges, and here and there an arching tree made cool shelter. Sometimes they would go to the woods, of which Jerry knew every inch, but the flock was not so easily managed there, and more often they would seek a certain spot by a pond, where willows drooped, and sloping banks made a pleasant resting place. From there they could watch their little charges without much difficulty.

It was indeed a lovely place. Grasses grew knee-deep about them; bold buttercups turned their yellow faces towards them, as though questioning their right to be there. Blue forget-me-nots nestled shyly in the damper parts; wild garlic and meadowsweet nodded a welcome; shepherd's delight told the state of the weather; milkwort cured the warts on Jerry's hands; white puffballs told the time—certainly not always correctly, but then, there was always Church Clock to put matters right. Nettles, it is true, are spiteful things, and apt to sting little legs unless care is taken, but within a hand's reach is always a cool healing dockleaf.

There were wonderful things around them—food, which can always be found by those who know the way; mallows, with a little imagination, make excellent cheeses; sorrel, of course, is salad; hawthorn shoots are young and succulent, and a little later on, the heart of a thistle, the thick outer skin of the rose-hips, and the scarlet haws, all make good eating to a child.

But the wild grasses, perhaps, had the most fascination. Quivering, quaking grass, which Betty, with an eye for beauty, plucked and arranged in a vase, only to be thrown away by Mrs. Chubbe. "Nasty stuff—cluttering up the place." The creeping grass, which, put in a sleeve, will run up and cause a certain amount of excitement when undressing as to distance; soft grasses, which Jerry would peel, and twist in Betty's unruly curls. But the wheat grass gave lasting delight, for with it fortunes are told, and to a child more than to anyone else the mystery of the future is purest romance. Betty worked the oracle, which, strangely enough, generally came the same, giving a wonderful touch of veracity.

"I'll tell fortunes," said she, when conversation flagged. Grasses grew thick, it was only a matter of choice. Then lazily leaning back, "I'll do myself first, Jerry, because you like to hear mine, don't you, and I don't care quite so much for yours. I'll see who I'm going to marry, first."

Then, with two small thumbs, she ran up the kernels pro-

jecting at each side. "Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief. Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man—" here, with very few exceptions, it ended, much to Betty's delight.

"'Cos I do want to be rich, Jerry, an' have everything nice. Now we'll try what sort of a house."

Again the little thumbs moved up, again the scarlet lips whispered, "Little house, big house, pigsty, barn. Little house, big house—" The tip of the grass was reached, and Betty's soul rejoiced again. "Silks, satins, cottons, rags. Silks, satins—. That's what I shall wear when I'm married," cried Betty gleefully. "Ladies always wear satin when they're married; Aunt Martha says so—an' I shall be a lady then. I'll just try one more, an' then I'll tell yours, Jerry. Coach, carriage, wheelbarrow, cart. Coach—" Betty's eyes sparkled. "That means I'm going to get both. It was 'carriage' yesterday. Now yours, Jerry."

Jerry bent close. His fortune varied between "rich man" and "thief," which perplexed him sorely.

"I couldn't be a thief, Betty, could I?"

"No, of course you couldn't. Rich people aren't thieves, and you're going to be a rich man."

Betty so settled the matter and threw away the grass.

"You don't want to know about your clothes, 'cos you're a boy, and if you're rich, of course, you'll live in a big house, and have a carriage. Let's play at something else. Tell me a tale, Jerry."

With the piece of clay, many memories had returned; old fairy tales came back, piecemeal at first, then wholly, and Betty reaped the benefit. To-day, it was the story of the Goose-Girl, to which she listened delightedly, fitting herself with the title rôle.

"I know," she cried, jumping up when it was ended, "we'll play it. You're not really a swineherd, but you can pretend the turkeys are pigs, and I'm really a Goose-Girl. P'raps I'm

really a princess, and you're a prince, Jerry. Oh, wouldn't it be beautiful?"

And so the summer days, the happy days of childhood, passed. It was one hot morning in August. Jerry, called from his crows, was working his clay into the form of a goose. Betty, lolling on the grass, watched idly. The sounds of wheels made them look up, and Betty sprang to her feet.

"It's Lady Kezzy," she whispered. "Get up, Jerry." Down the road came a low pony chaise, driven by my lady. She cast a glance at the geese and turkeys pecking by the wayside, and fluttering almost under the pony's hoofs, then raised her eyes and caught sight of the children.

"Is that you, Betty Chubbe? Come here; I want to speak to you." Betty ran quickly forward, curtseying as she came; she was rather a favourite with Lady Kezzy, and knew it.

"How is your aunt?"

"She's quite well, thank you, please my lady."

"Well, will you give her this message? Tell her that Lady Mary is coming on a visit, and that we shall probably come in and see her one day soon. Can you remember, child?"

"Oh, yes, my lady."

"That's a good girl. And now, how are the lessons? I hear you are going to school." Betty's head drooped; she quilted the edge of her pinny and remained silent. Lady Kezzy smiled.

"Not very well, I'm afraid. Ah, Betty, your aunt should have let you come to me." The child looked up hastily.

"Please, my lady, Aunt Martha wanted to get rid of me in the morning—I'm naughty. You see, in the evening wouldn't have been any good."

"I see." The smile deepened on the comely face—the blue eyes twinkled. "Well, Betty, I'm glad you're truthful; that's better than learning." She gathered up her reins, then, as a goose waddled solemnly under the pony's nose, dropped them, and caught sight of Jerry.

"What little boy is that, Betty?"

"It's Jerry, my lady."

"Jerry!" echoed my lady. "Oh!" as remembrance came to her assistance, "the artist's child, of course."

She moved a beckoning finger. Jerry came forward and lifted his cap. Lady Kezzy looked surprised.

"You're the little boy who lives with Widow Hagges, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lady," said Jerry, cap in hand.

"And you and Betty are great friends, no doubt." The two little faces smiled at each other.

"Yes, I see you are. What's your other name, Jerry?"

For a moment Jerry stared astonished—then bewildered. Had he got another name? Somewhere, deep down, something roused at the suggestion. Surely, long ago, there was something beside plain Jerry; but he stood perplexed, troubled, and the lady watched him.

"Have you forgotten?" she asked gently. "Well, never mind. What is that you have in your hand?" Jerry looked down; it was the modelling clay.

"May I see?" She put out her hand, and took the nearly finished goose from him, criticising it carefully.

"Who taught you, my dear?"

"My daddy." At the mention of the name the tears rose. Lady Kezzy saw the flush, the hasty brushing away of a tear, but said nothing. She was handling the piece of clay with a critical eye. Travel and social intercourse had given her a certain knowledge, and she knew that, rough as the thing was, there was a certain something which marked at least the artist. She waited till the child had regained his composure, then handed it back.

"It's very nice, my dear. Do you like doing it?" Jerry looked thoughtful. The question had never occurred to him; it was a natural thing to handle the clay. On the whole, he supposed he did, and said so.

"And do you go to school with Betty?" she asked next. Betty put in an oar.

"No, my lady. Jerry scares crows in the morning, but he wants to go to school, and he knows his alphabet."

"And I used to be able to spell a little," said Jerry sadly. "But I can't remember." Lady Kezzy smiled; she was more than usually interested.

"Suppose you say your alphabet to me, and see how much you know." Jerry stood straight, put his hands behind him—these being among the few instructions given by Betty—and began. At H things hung fire; Lady Kezzy gave assistance, and the quiet little voice went on smoothly to the difficult country of P's and R's, where more help was needed. After that all was well, and Jerry finished triumphantly, "W X Y Z and Amperzand."

Lady Kezzy smiled again. She recognised Betty's hand at the end. The child's father, she shrewdly surmised, would have been content with twenty-six letters.

"Very nicely said, my dear. Now, how would you like to come to my evening school?" Jerry's eyes glistened—his breath came quickly. "Oh—" It was all, but the listener understood.

"Then suppose I go straight on to the cottage and settle it with Mrs. Hagges." Jerry drew a long breath.

"Thank you very much, my lady." She nodded to the children as they stood, oblivious of geese and turkeys, Betty even forgetting to curtsey, till the little pony chaise, with its ribbons and tinkling bells, had vanished. Betty gave a delighted caper and skipped back to the seat.

"Jerry, isn't it be-u-tiful? Won't you be glad?" Jerry nodded.

"My lady must be very kind," he said thoughtfully, "'cos I'm only a little boy, and I can't learn much; but I'll try, oh, I *will* try," he added earnestly.

"An' you'll be able to help me, won't you, Jerry?" pleaded

lazy Betty. Then, suddenly changing the subject, "Oh, Jerry, isn't it an exciting morning? I do want to see Lady Mary. You see, she's never been here since she was a baby."

"Is she old, like the other ladies?" asked Jerry.

"N-no—" Betty hesitated. "I think she must be only grown up."

"Perhaps she's a little girl," said Jerry, but Betty scornfully repudiated the suggestion.

"How could she be a little girl? She's Lady Mary, little girls aren't ladies," and Jerry retired defeated, then started up, suddenly remembering.

"Oh! Betty—the geese." The two children scrambled up, separating in search of the truants, and, amidst much fluttering and noise, collected the flock. Church Clock struck ten, and Betty plucked a puffball to check the time. As she stood blowing and counting, again the sound of hoofs came near. Always curious, she flung away the flower, glanced along the road, and flew back to Jerry.

"It's the little count," she whispered gleefully. "Oh, Jerry, you couldn't be like him."

Jerry looked up. A small Shetland pony, bearing the little boy he had seen in church, was coming merrily along, its flowing tail and mane floating out on the breeze, its mischievous head wagging and nodding with all sorts of ponyish thoughts. Behind, on a sedate horse, came a groom. The child wore a bored expression and ambled listlessly along, setting the pace.

Betty, never behind when great folk were about, stood well into the roadway, and it was not long before the child on his pony caught sight of her; also of Jerry under the trees. A look of interest lighted up his face, and he beckoned. Betty, nothing loath, came forward, but the little count shook his head fretfully, and waved her away.

"You're Betty Chubbe, I know you, but who's the little boy under the trees?"

"It's Jerry," answered Betty.

"Jerry," repeated the other. "Tell him I want him." Betty turned and motioned with her hand. Count Paul leaned forward impatiently, interest lighting up the little dark, sallow face.

"She says you're Jerry," he said, pointing his whip at Betty. "Tell me what you are doing, Jerry."

"We're minding Farmer Chubbe's geese."

"Yes, I know." Again the note of hasty fretfulness. "But what do you do? Do you play?"

"Y-yes, sometimes. We talk, and tell tales, and pretend."

"Pretend!" The fretfulness was gone; only eager curiosity prevailed. "How?—tell me?" Jerry looked hopeless; his tongue was not a ready one. But Betty stepped forward.

"We pretend he's a swineherd, the turkeys are the pigs, an' I'm a Goose-Girl. I really am, you know. But really and truly, he's a prince an' I'm a princess; and his name's Conrad—and—"

"Oh," interrupted the Count, his face aglow with interest, "I'll come and play, too." He began to scramble off his pony. Jerry and Betty eyed him askance, then looked at each other in dismay. Perhaps he saw the look, for he stopped.

"I'm so sorry. I ought to have asked if you'd have me. Will you? Please say you will," he added pleadingly.

"Let's have him, Jerry," urged Betty, and Jerry, somewhat reluctantly, agreed.

"Thank you very much," said the Count, finishing his descent, and turning to the groom, who had waited silently for orders. "Take my pony, Thompson, and tell my father I am stopping to play with Jerry and Betty Chubbe." The groom stepped forward, a perplexed look on his face.

"Sir, you can't, you mustn't play with these children. His Excellency would not like it." The child held his head up, a haughty look in his face. Jerry and Betty waited breathlessly.

"How dare you disobey me. Take my pony—at once," with an angry stamp, "and give my father my message."

"Very good, sir." The man touched his hat, and with an

almost imperceptible shrug, took the pony's reins, and mounting his own horse, rode off. The three children drew breath again.

"Now we can play," cried Betty.

"Only we must get the geese together again," said Jerry.

The count assisted. At first the others demurred. Instinctively they knew that counts do not tend geese, except in disguise, nor play with swineherds. They may sit on a bank with a goose-girl, and talk to her, even make love, but with a goose-girl, too, there is a hard and fast line between that and friendship.

The flock being collected they went back to their seat, and room was made for the third child. At first, a shy stiffness prevented progress, but it wore off quickly, and long before Church Clock struck eleven the children were laughing, chatting, and making believe as though there were no such thing as inequalities in position nor difference between fine Nankeen pants and a smock frock; for with work Jerry had taken the symbol of it—the clothes which mark the worker.

The game of pretence went merrily enough. Betty made a wreath of flowers and at once became a princess. Paul was a great acquisition; he knew the ways and manners of princesses, and—the children listened with bated breath—he had once seen a real one.

"But she wasn't like a princess at all," he told them. "She was fat and old, and she wore a big bonnet, instead of a crown, and she looked so cross and ugly."

"Perhaps she was disguised," said Betty.

"Or perhaps a witch had enchanted her," suggested Jerry. Paul shook his head. "I don't know. Anyhow, she wasn't a bit like a princess. Betty is," he added. "I think when she grows up, she'll be one exactly."

"Do you?" cried Betty, clapping her hands, and Paul assented gravely. Indeed, she looked it. Dark eyes glittering like stars, lips gleaming scarlet as the geranium in the widow's window, little pearly white teeth flashing, and the sunlight

through the trees making coppery curls shine like red gold.

"Oh, Jerry, I do think it's been the most exciting morning." Jerry nodded; he, too, had been thinking.

"It's just like a real fairy tale," he said with a sigh of content. "There's you, Betty—you're the goose-girl who's really a princess—and there's me, and I'm really a prince. An' Lady Kezzy's the fairy godmother, who's given us all we want, and I think—" he looked shyly at the other boy, "you're the knight who comes riding down the road and rescues the princess." Again Betty clapped her hands with delight.

"We'll pretend the willow tree's an ogre, and that little hill's his castle, and I'm his prisoner. Oh! it's the be-u-ti-full-est play."

And so on. Till Church Clock struck the third quarter, when geese must be gathered together, and a march made for home and dinner and all the practical, uninteresting things which mark the grown-up from the child. With many promises to meet on the morrow, the children separated. Count Paul watched the two go, then strolled leisurely back with a feeling of wonderment at the unexpected delights of the morning. There was no fear in his heart. Between Count de Cosse and his son was perfect confidence, and long before luncheon was over Paul had rendered account of his doings. His father heard, but said nothing, even when plans were made for the next day's meeting. But in the afternoon he rode across the fields to the Dower House, and consulted ostensibly the ladies—in reality, Lady Kezzy.

Lady Karen listened with cautious interest—interest half centred on the elaborate piece of woolwork stretched on a frame before her; Lady Kezzy eagerly, glancing often at the thin grave face, which, except for the pointed Vandyke beard and lines of middle age, was a larger copy of his son's.

"You will scarce believe me, ladies," he said as the tale was finished, "when I tell you that the child looked better than I have seen him for many a long day; there was even a

slight trace of colour in his cheeks, and he ate as though he enjoyed his food." Lady Karen paused a moment, stepping backwards to inspect her work.

"I have always said that Paul wanted children of his own age. But village children; my dear Count, you cannot allow it."

"And yet—" the Count spoke slowly, "in my father's country, the son of the nobleman played with his foster brothers and sisters and came to no harm."

"But these are not even foster brothers and sisters," replied Lady Karen.

"But, sister—" Lady Kezzy's voice came pleadingly, "they are really very nice children. No one could help loving little Betty, and as for the boy—he's coming to my class, you know, and I'm quite sure he's a genius, and will one day be a great sculptor. His modelling is wonderful." Lady Karen smiled grimly.

"Keziah is a dreamer." There was the slightest touch of scorn in her voice. "Her geese are always swans, and every Jack and Jill honest and virtuous till they're found out. Even then, I'm not sure she's not sorry for them."

"Oh, Karen," cried my Lady Kezzy, "of course, I'm sorry for them. So are you, only you won't say so. And really they're dear children. I'm sure they could hurt no one, not even Mary." Lady Karen turned haughtily.

"If Paul allows his son to play with these children, it is nothing to me. But you understand, Keziah, Mary has nothing to do with it. When she comes, you or I will take her to visit the principal tenants; it is right that she should know them, even," she paused, and sighed almost imperceptibly, "even if only for a few years. But when she is with Paul, remember they are not to associate with any of the village children. Please understand." She swept from the room with a proud disdain. Lady Kezzy looked troubled.

"Karen and Edward are so particular," she said. "They really almost frighten me. But you're not afraid, are you?

You'll let little Paul play with them, they're such nice children?"

The Count came near.

"Yes, Kezzy," he said. "They shall play together, since you ask it—as we used to play together in the days so long ago," he added with a smile.

The crimson sunset was falling. It cast a rosy glow over Lady Kezzy's face, and a slight tinge was reflected on the count's clear olive skin. For a moment there was silence; Paul broke it. "I must go. Walk a little with me, Kezzy, as you used to."

She walked beside him down the great avenue, the sunset's flush still lingering in the sky and on her face. Though their words were light, the remembrance of the past was in their minds, making them thoughtful. At the end of the road she stopped and said good-bye. Maybe her hand lingered a little longer in his than usual, maybe there was a tender light in his eyes as he lifted it reverently to his lips. And though the sunset was behind her, and the brilliance had faded from the sky, the crimson in her cheek was soft and warm as she retraced her steps and sought her room.

So it came about that the children played together every afternoon. And oh! the wonderful tales they told, the wonderful people they became, the glorious land they stepped into, where love and romance are everywhere, and youth is ever youth; where maidens are fair, and men are always noble, and all is fairy in that land behind the curtain, whose one side is dull grey, but whose other is crimson and shining gold. Even grown-ups can lift it and go through and enter the beautiful country of dreams, which perhaps is reality; where every lovely wish is fulfilled, every baleful thing left behind, and time is only time for those who make it so. Alas! that so few know of that country, the country that little feet can enter at will. For every new-born child, as he steps through the curtain into the cold, bare world, brings with him some of the glory, and till that fades away, he is free of that beautiful country, and is indeed a citizen of no mean City.

CHAPTER VII

TELLS OF HOW THE GOOSE-GIRL MET THE FAIRY, AND OF WHAT WAS IN THE PEDLAR'S PACK

THE news went through the village, and tenants scrubbed, scoured, and red-ochred in honour of the Earl's daughter, till even the very cats and dogs wore a festal appearance, and husbands were known to ask of their wives, "if they had washed the chimney stacks, and tied up the pigs' tails with blue ribbon."

There was to be no demonstration. My lord was inflexible on this point. Lady Mary would arrive on the Monday, but woe to the villager whose curiosity led him to linger by the wayside in hope of catching sight of her. So Cloudesley slept its usual drowsy sleep that afternoon. Only two children tending geese saw the rolling dust which heralded her appearance. Betty's sharp eyes were first to notice it.

"Jerry, Jerry," she whispered, "it's the great coach from the Hall. Let's go and look."

Mindful of the edict, they crept behind a tree and watched the gathering cloud roll nearer and nearer. The galloping horses, newly changed at Channington, so that my Lady Mary might arrive with the *éclat* due to her state, pranced and foamed, only kept in check by my lord's outriders, in their rich sober liveries of dark blue and silver. Simon, my lord's old coachman, fat and red-faced, sat on the broad box in full dress, while behind, in the rumble, the children caught a glimpse of a smart damsel, and an equally smart man, doubtless my lady's attendant. Two of the Hall footmen hung on behind, but that was the extent of the show, for the blinds were closely drawn, and the huge vehicle passed out of sight,

leaving the children deeply impressed and Betty greatly conscious of the tale she would have to tell.

Mrs. Chubbe made her calculations. Calling back her remembrances of the Hall, she decided that Tuesday would be given up to rest and settling down, and on Wednesday, the more important tenants, among whom Mr. Chubbe stood first, might be honoured with a visit.

She arranged her household accordingly, but like many another "best laid" plan, it went awry. Betty, kept at home on Tuesday to help clear up, was busy stripping red currants preparatory to converting them into jam. Her aunt, in and out of back'us, kitchen, and dairy, was startled by the sight of two ladies coming across the meadow. Dropping her skimmer into the great pan of morning milk, she stared, in her astonishment forgetting to pick it out.

"Lawk-a-daisy! if it isn't my Lady Kezzy comin' this mornin' of all times. An' me in my apron an' pattens, an' Betty—" the name reminded her. Hastily untying the big apron, she rolled it up, slipped off the pattens, and hurried to the pantry.

"Betty, child, go quick an' wash your hands an' brush your hair. Here's my ladies comin' up the meadow, an' a pretty mess we're in. Was ever such a thing heard of? An' Matthew gone to Channington. Dch—Dch—Dch!"

Betty flew. Mrs. Chubbe, returning to the kitchen, gave a quick glance round, moved a basin from the table, flicked a speck of dust off the dresser, peeped into the dairy and pantry with another "Dch—Dch," though how they could have been tidier or cleaner only herself could have told; then, carefully closed their doors and stood waiting till the two figures crossed the stile and their steps were heard on the flagged pathway.

"An' the back'us door, too," murmured Mrs. Chubbe plaintively. "That's Lady Kezzy all over; Lady Karen would ha' had the big door open, though it took two on us to do it—it's that stuck from want of using." The footsteps drew

nearer—the time had come to cross casually the back'us and greet the visitors.

Lady Kezzy stood at the door, and beside her a small, slight child, dressed simply in white. Mrs. Chubbe gave a swift glance of curiosity and fell in love. Her first thought was of Betty, but it was the contrast of the sun and the moon. Betty's brilliant colouring, vivid piquancy, and flashing beauty, were lacking. In their place were eyes blue as the summer cornflower, softly deep as a mountain lake; long curls, not copper gold like Betty's, but with the gold of corn in August, and a skin so fair and thin, that the blue veins showed their network and the flowing of the warm blood beneath was almost perceptible.

Mrs. Chubbe held up her hands in dismay. "Oh, my ladies, to think of you comin' here an' catchin' me in this mess. An' you at the back'us door when there's a front one an' clean—not but what I'm that pleased."

"Why, Martha," said Lady Kezzy, as she stepped over the threshold, "I'm sure you're always as spick and span as a new pin. I've brought my niece to see you and your dairy and pigs. She's a little Londoner, you know, and has to learn country ways."

Mrs. Chubbe curtseyed again.

"An' indeed it's an honour, my lady, to see you. Though I have seen your ladyship before, when you were but a wee thing in a long lace gown." Then suddenly mindful of forbidden ground, "but there—I'm talkin' an' keepin' you standin'. Come in, my ladies."

She led the way through the cool stone back'us to the kitchen. Quickly dusting two chairs, which had never known the feel of dust, she placed them before the visitors.

"Where is Betty, Martha?" asked Lady Kezzy. "I want Mary to see her. Betty's a great favourite of mine, my dear," she turned to her companion, "though I'm afraid," she laughed merrily, "that she gives her aunt something to think of."

"Aye, my lady, she does that. But I must say she's turnin'

a new leaf since she's gone to school, an' in the afternoon she tends the geese, an' Jerry don't let her get into mischief." My lady looked up.

"Jerry? Ah, that's the little boy who's coming to my school. He seems a nice child, Martha."

"My lady, you couldn't find a nicer, search the world over. He's a bit quiet for a child, but that's no fault, an' he's lonely, poor laddie, since his father died."

She stopped at the sound of light footsteps on the stairway. A moment after Betty appeared, fresh-frocked, brushed and washed for the company, an expression of eager excitement on her face. Yet even as she stepped down the last stair into the kitchen, it faded. Astonishment, disappointment, something altogether strange to Mrs. Chubbe, took its place, and she made as though to go back.

Her aunt saw the movement and called "Betty."

The child slowly turned. Lady Kezzy looked round, and her niece, following her example, smiled across at the other child. Mrs. Chubbe, with a puzzled look, gazed from one to the other. Betty had never before shown shyness like this.

"Come in, child; don't stand staring there." Slowly, reluctantly, the small feet crept over the red bricks.

"Betty," there was a touch of amazed anger in the voice, "where's your manners, child? Curtsey to my lady." Still with that curious expression on her small face, the child obeyed, dropping as low an obeisance as could be desired. The white clad figure behind Lady Kezzy had risen, and now stood smiling into the brilliant, provoking face opposite.

"Now to my Lady Mary, Betty," continued Mrs. Chubbe, slightly mollified. But Betty stood straight.

"Betty, do you hear me? Curtsey to my lady."

A murmured whisper came from the defiant lips, almost it sounded like "No," as Mrs. Chubbe stood aghast, wondering if Heaven itself would open and rain fire on such audacity. Lady Mary laughed, a low rippling laugh, and my Lady Kezzy,

almost as frightened as her hostess, opened her mouth to speak, but the farmer's wife forestalled her.

"My lady, my lady, you must forgive her. I'm afraid she's sadly spoilt." Then to the culprit, "Betty, you bad, wicked child; curtsey to your betters, and thank the ladies for their kindness. My lady," she turned deprecatingly, "she shall have the soundest whipping—" She stopped. Mary had flown to her, and now, with a little gloved hand resting on hers, a little fair face, turned upward, pleaded for the offender.

"Mrs. Chubbe, don't please spoil our visit. She didn't mean any harm, I'm sure; and you'll hurt me far more than Betty if you beat her. Please—"

Mrs. Chubbe's bark was worse than her bite. Already the grim face had relaxed, and the child, seizing her advantage, urged no more, but turned to the other.

"Betty," she moved closer, "why didn't you want to curtsey to me?" There was curiosity in her voice, and the two elders watched from very interest. Betty put her finger in her mouth, said nothing, but gazed at the flower-like face before her, half defiant, half fascinated.

"Betty, do tell me. I shan't be a bit angry."

The finger came out, was wiped nervously on the white pinny. The bright head hung slightly, and a suspicion of shamed colour rose in the little face. There was a moment of breathless suspense.

"Because," murmured Betty, still drawing her finger up and down, "because—" The brilliant eyes suddenly lifted and looked with proud decision straight into the blue eyes watching, "because you're only a little girl, like me, my lady."

It was over. The suspense broke up. Mrs. Chubbe, drawing a long breath, would have pounced, but Mary held up a warning hand. Betty shot a defiant glance at the waiting gods, then a wondering one at the other child. Mary nodded.

"I quite understand," she said, and Lady Kezzy gasped. "I don't mind curtseying to my aunts, but I shouldn't like

to, to another little girl. But—" she moved closer, "if you won't curtsey to me, Betty, will you kiss me?"

Betty stared—made a kind of choking sound, and started forward, flinging her arms wildly round the other's neck.

"Oh, my lady, my lady, I do love you, and if you want me to, I'll curtsey just as much as ever you like." Mary returned the embrace warmly, and laughed.

"Of course, I don't want you to, Betty. Friends don't curtsey to each other, and we're going to be friends, aren't we?"

Betty nodded. Something choked in her throat, and her eyes were moist. Lady Kezzy half rose, a puzzled expression in her mild eyes; she was unused to violent emotion. It was Mrs. Chubbe who saved the situation, breaking in somewhat reproachfully:

"My lady, if you encourage the naughty girl in her fancies, what can I do?" Her visitor seized the opportunity.

"Martha is quite right, Mary. Betty forgot her manners for the moment, and besides, was disobedient. She will apologise, I'm sure, for her rudeness, won't you, my dear?"

And Betty, subdued by the force of love, dropped a curtsey to my Lady Kezzy, although still careful not to include her niece, and, prompted by her aunt, said her words.

"Please, my lady, I'm sorry I was rude. Will you kindly forgive me?" Lady Kezzy breathed a sigh of relief. The incident, confirming her sister's judgment, had upset her, and she was thankful to see the end, mentally resolving that during Mary's short visit, there should be no repetition.

"And now, Martha, will you show us your dairy, and let us have a drink of milk. Mary is so anxious to see the chickens and pigs."

A certain stiffness lingered during the remainder of the visit. Only the children, with children's power of throwing away unpleasantness, were thoroughly at ease, and both grown-ups parted with a sense of duty done. Strangely enough, no scolding was forthcoming. Mrs. Chubbe continued her skim-

ming and Betty her currant stalking. It was not until the afternoon that the visitors were referred to again. Then, as usual, it was Betty's tongue which always followed the workings of her brain.

"Aunt Martha, isn't Lady Mary beautiful? I do love her. Don't you?" Mrs. Chubbe gazed abstractedly into the small upturned face and made no answer. Her thoughts were seemingly far away.

"Isn't she, Aunt Martha?" Betty got more than she bargained for. Mrs. Chubbe stooped, caught the little figure in a close embrace, holding her fast for a moment; then, with a somewhat shame-faced expression, set her hastily down.

"There, there, child, run away; Lady Mary's everything that's sweet and good. More's the pity," she added, under her breath. And Betty, her curiosity roused almost to bursting point, durst ask no questions, but slipped away, profoundly mystified, and with a queer feeling on her cheek of a kiss, and something wet, like a tear. Stranger still was the fact, that though she expatiated on Lady Mary to Jerry, she was silent about the later incident. Somehow she could not speak of it. A student of humanity might have told her that real love cannot be spoken of—it dwells in the heart, silently.

The visit was not repeated. Neither did the children catch another glimpse of the ladies, although they were heard of as having called at several of the larger farms. On the Saturday Mary returned to London, and Cloudesley dropped into its usual monotony. Jerry was bitterly disappointed. Betty had fired his interest, and, unknown to her, he had lurked in lanes which led to the different farms, had secreted himself behind bushes outside the Hall gates, in the hope of catching sight of the wonderful being, glorified by Betty into something between an angel and a fairy, altogether beyond anything in this wicked world.

But it was not to be. Jerry, with a deep sigh, submitted to the inevitable and applied himself to work. He was getting on—"like a stack on fire," the schoolmistress said—and

Lady Kezzy singled him out for special approbation. Soon, very soon now, he would be able to write a letter to Margery. A child keeps no count of time, and it never occurred to Jerry that she might be with him before a letter could reach her.

His hoard of pennies was growing, and with the acquiring of new knowledge, another want, a personal one, arose. Books were practically unknown in either the cottage or the inn, but on several occasions Lady Kezzy brought to the school illustrated volumes of travel, and Jerry looked at the pictures and listened to her explanations with eyes and ears entranced. To possess such a thing became his one desire. The churn and waistcoat had long ago been dismissed as impossible, though Betty's wants still held good. Those, after sorting out, resolved themselves into a new ribbon and a cake of soap. The remainder (Jerry worked it out to a nicety) might perhaps buy the coveted possession, "when pedlar comes," which would probably not be until November. Jerry possessed his soul in patience, and accumulated pennies, which Farmer Chubbe kept for him, adding occasionally a small bonus for luck.

There was little time for loneliness, yet, in the quiet of his small room, especially after he got into bed, there were times when he longed inexpressibly for the sympathy, the interchange of words, with one who loved and understood; for some of the old merry chatter and laughter, for a glimpse into the world of story and legend, which can only be given by one who has the key. There was, too, the childish longing for affection, for kisses, for a warm, soft shoulder to lean against, the touch of a gentle hand, the sound of a loving voice. And sometimes, before he dropped off, he wondered vaguely when Margery would come again.

Mrs. Chubbe and the widow wondered too, the former, solicitous for the child's welfare, the latter, for the profit he brought. In September came the looked for letter, and its contents cast a gloom over Jerry's little life which took weeks to remove. Margery was not coming. A little child

had come and gone, leaving an empty space where no space had been, a space of which the mother, hovering between life and death, was as yet unconscious. When she awoke, she would realise, and between the lines of Margery's letter, those who could, read of a great battle between the love for kith and kin, and the love of adoption. In the end natural affection conquered, and Margery stayed, with a promise to return, if possible, next year. "Tell Mrs. Hagges, dearie," went on the letter, "that I have written to the lawyers, and the money will go on as before." Then followed expressions of love, crossed kisses, and all that could be said in a letter written from dictation. As before, Jerry got it at second hand, and it fired him to further efforts. Perhaps by the time the next came he would be able to read real writing.

September went by. The geese were sold, probably eaten. Corn was cut and garnered, and the summer tasks came to an end. The goose-girl changed to an ordinary child; the swineherd dug potatoes and beets, herding cows in the intervals; the knight mounted his steed and rode away to the castle. But there were times when he stole out and helped pick the potatoes from their stalks or stack the bulging crimson roots. No longer was he pale and fretful. Count de Cosse had watched joyfully the pale face tan and fill out, the thin frame broaden.

"We'll make an Englishman of you yet, Paul," he said one day, and the child answered gravely, "Yes, Farmer Chubbe says I shall be able to fight Jerry soon, and Jerry's very strong."

The count laughed, taking much credit to himself, but giving some to Lady Kezzy. She, with a woman's thought for the future, wondered if, after all, they had been wise. The visit to the inn lingered unpleasantly in her mind. Did Mary, in her London home, ever think of it? Betty's memory, she guessed, was long.

As October waned, Jerry heard many allusions to "pedlar's visit." Mrs. Chubbe wanted dimity for curtains, Betty had

been promised red cloth for a winter pelisse. Handkerchiefs for the farmer, a ribbon for Sally and Nancy, various odds and ends as the time grew short. The widow had long ago determined on a length of black merino. Jerry, saying very little, dreamt of the treasures his money would purchase with now and then a sinking of heart.

"Suppose there were no books in pedlar's pack."

The great event loomed near. Word came that pedlar had arrived at the neighbouring village of Thaxton, and Jerry, excitement causing his heart to beat furiously, then almost stop, sought out the farmer after his morning's work was done. He found him in the small inn parlour smoking a pipe with Peter the Ranger, who was evidently full of news. He glanced up, smiled at the small figure, and motioned him to a seat at his side. Peter gave a casual nod, and went on.

"My lord's mighty pertic'lar, but he woan't find much to grumble at, I'll lay my life. There's woods without a dead branch in 'em, an' hedges where a rabbit couldn't go through. An' there's game for more'n my lord's bringin'. 'Tis reason —for years there been no company oop there—" jerking a thumb in the direction of the Hall. "An' the birds are cryin' out to be shot. There's foxes, too, in plenty. Silly creatures, don't know the difference 'tween a hound an' a spaniel. But they'll learn, oh, they'll learn fast enough," he added with a chuckle, "when huntin' time comes, an' my lord an' his gentlemen ride with the pack, which is eatin' its head off in the kennels."

"Who's comin', Peter?" interrupted the farmer, knowing that the Ranger, once set going on the subject of neglected sport, was warranted to go on till forcibly stopped.

"Who's comin'? Aye, there, I don't rightly know. Mrs. Lovegrove says six gentlemen, an' a young 'un—Sir Francis Crewe's son. But there'll be fine doin's—fine doin's—and time enough too. Maybe my lord's shaken off the trouble, an' Cloudesley'll be all the better, say I—an' you too, Mr. Chubbe, I'll be bound. It'll bring custom." The clink of

money and a call interrupted the flow of conversation. The ranger finished his tankard of ale with noisy appreciation, and rose.

"Well, I'll be going. Good-mornin' to you, landlord; good-mornin', boy." The farmer nodded, then, motioning Jerry to stay where he was, served the waiting customer, returning after a short colloquy.

"An' now, laddie, what d'ye want?"

Jerry looked up, his brown eyes full of suppressed excitement. "Oh, please, Mr. Chubbe, they say pedlar's coming soon, and I want to buy a book and some things, and please, if you don't mind very much, may I have my money?" The farmer smiled broadly down.

"Well, well, to think on it. After savin' an' savin', an' now wants to spend. What's the need, laddie? Can't ye let it bide?" Jerry shook his head.

"'Tisn't wasting it, Mr. Chubbe," he said eagerly; "really. I can read now, you know, and I do want a book of my own, so very much." Again the listener smiled.

"D'ye know how much there is, my boy?" Jerry's reckoning had been too close to allow for hesitation.

"Three and six," he answered promptly.

"Aye," said the farmer slowly. "There's that, an' more. What d'ye think of five grand new shillin's?" The brown face flushed hotly.

"Oh, Mr. Chubbe—how good you are. Thank you, thank you, very, very much." And the farmer felt repaid with interest.

"How much'll the book be?"

"I don't quite know, but I thought about two shillings. If I might have three and six, please. I won't waste it, I promise."

"Well, well," Mr. Chubbe rose leisurely, "I shouldn't wonder if you want to buy a fairin', an' I know who for. You're a good laddie, an' Betty's a spoilt little hussy. I can't say you nay, but don't spend it all on her."

He was opening a drawer as he spoke, and now drew out a great cash box and gave into the little hand, horny and grimed with work, four glittering silver shillings. Jerry regarded them with quickening breath and an expression such as older people might wear when holding a million pound note. Finally he produced a piece of rag, laid his property in it and secured it with a string, tying it all round his neck, there to keep company with the amulet till the great day arrived.

"Take care of it, laddie," said the farmer as the child went off. Jerry nodded. His thanks had been few, but they were understood.

"Don't take much to make a child happy," soliloquised the farmer, as he turned in to his dinner. "Well, well."

The pedlar drew nearer, arriving at length one Thursday, cart and all, at the inn. But first skim was not for such people as the widow. To the Hall, where his pack gave much satisfaction and some hours' amusement to the crowd of idle varlets and maids assembled for my lord's company; on to the Dower House, where even my Lady Kezzy condescended to purchase winter flannel for Christmas gifts; next to the inn and large farms, then the smaller tenantry, and at last—at last—late on the Saturday afternoon, to the cottage in the lane came the pedlar, enveloped in mystery, heavy with the atmosphere of London, of countryside and lonely wanderings, of drugs and perfumes from the far East, of fine laces and lawns from sunny France, of cashmeres soft and warm, of garnets, topazes, and amethysts from blue lapped, palm-fringed shores, even of gleaming pearls from wondrous tropical seas.

He himself was a short, stout man, with dark, strongly marked features, lustrous eyes, black hair, and a curious foreign accent—a Jew, without question, and with all the Jew's keen, alert air, where business was concerned. Folk said he must be worth a sight of money, and there were vague rumours of a shop in London filled with wonders of the earth,

replenished from great ships whose captains traded with its master.

It was only a humble pack which he unstrapped in the widow's kitchen. No mystery or romance there. Within five minutes chairs were draped artistically in soft colours, while on the table lay sparkling brooches, belts, handkerchiefs, cheap caps, shawls, fronts of various tinted hair, stockings, in fact everything necessary to the toilet of a lady not too well-to-do. The widow shook her head as the brightly coloured materials were flaunted before her. Pedlar said little, but continued to throw his wares lightly over every available article of furniture. He stopped once, when the widow, suddenly interested, handled a grey merino, whose silver folds decorated the red-cushioned chair.

"Now that is strange," cried the pedlar, holding up two dark podgy hands, "my lady at the house bought one similaire. Her taste is goot, and yours, madame," he smiled and bowed, "is quite equal. See," he moved the shimmering folds, "how soft, how bekomming. And dirt cheap." He named the price, but the widow, still holding the material, shook her head.

"Ach! then I will meet you." The price came down, again it was met with a sign of negation. The pedlar sighed, then began to fold up.

"It is a pity, but perhaps some other time. We will now see the black dress."

The material, hurriedly folded, lay on a chair, and the widow, with an occasional glance at its alluring folds, inspected the sombre length laid out. It was soon decided on, and the pedlar proceeded to pack up. Presently she turned to the chair and once more lovingly fingered the grey dress.

"It's very pretty," she murmured. The pedlar took no notice, only Jerry, standing by the table, saw the sharp glance in his eye.

"And cheap, too," came the low whisper. To the onlookers the musings were of prices and wearing properties. In the widow's brain lurked thoughts very similar to those of

the maids at the Hall. In imagination she saw herself attired in the grey dress, ministering to the wants of Mr. Padden. She held it up against her, peeped into the bit of glass on the wall, with precisely the same expression as Sally or Nancy might have worn, and something as soft as the graceful folds, crept into her face.

"Yes, I'll take it," she said suddenly. "You can put it by." The pedlar, all attention now, turned from his packing.

"Ach! said I not that madame's goot taste would prevail. And now—a cap of Buckinghamshire lace, which is cheap, and a ribbon for the neck."

The bargaining went on. To Jerry, waiting with suppressed impatience, it seemed interminable. At last it was over, the money paid, and the widow departed with her treasures, telling Jerry not to be long.

"And now, little master, what can I find for so small a customer?" The dark, keen eyes were bent on him; they seemed to read his very thoughts.

"Oh, if you please, Mr. Pedlar, have you got a book?"

"A book?" He shook his head, and Jerry's heart sunk like lead. "It is not a common thing to ask for, but we will see—we will see."

He turned to another part of the great pack, and undoing fastenings, laid back the leather covering and disclosed wares of another kind. Silks, wools, and various materials for working lay on one side, on the other, a few Bibles and Prayer Books, and a small pile of writing paper. The pedlar dipped beneath, and produced a thickish volume of "The Keepsake," a fashionable periodical of the time, elegantly bound in crimson watered silk, but somewhat stained and tattered.

"Though where I got it, I cannot say," said its owner, shaking his head, and turning the pages thoughtfully. Jerry gazed with excited longing; there were pictures he could see, and big reading. Surely such a volume would be beyond his means.

"Well?" the black eyes gazed curiously at him. "Shall we

say—two shillings?" A weight lifted itself from Jerry's heart; he breathed deeply.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Pedlar; yes, that will do nicely." The treasure was handed over; the money bag produced after much fumbling, and, with fingers trembling with delight, two of the bright shillings were counted out. Betty's ribbon and bottle of scent caused much thoughtful consideration, but at last the bargain was clinched, leaving threepence over, which was invested in snuff for the farmer, and Jerry stood, shorn of his riches it is true, but withal a very happy little boy. The pedlar cast a sidelong glance as he stood watching the packing.

"Do you live here, my leetle boy?" he asked at length. Jerry nodded.

"But I shan't always. When Margie comes home, we shall live together, and keep pigs and chickens. She's my nurse, you know."

The pedlar gathered up his goods, folding and packing them, but said nothing. When at last the big straps were pulled and buckled, he turned.

"You will not always live here, that I can see. I see much; you will come to London, will you not? And then you will see many wonderful things. You will see great houses, and the great people who live therein, ships, and the big river which brings all the wealth of the world to London. And then your wings will grow big and strong. They are sprouting now, I feel them." He touched Jerry's shoulders lightly —once—twice. "And then, perhaps you will fly away, but not for long, oh, not for long. For once you kom to London city, you must kom again. Will you kom?" The child listened with entrancement in his eyes. The soft tones, the simple words, conjured up magic pictures, vague, bewildering, yet beautiful.

"Yes, I will come some day, when I am grown up."

"There are a few years to wait for zat." The pedlar smiled. "But I shall kom again next year, and the next. And if you want more books, I will send them if you write to me. Here

is my address." He took out a piece of paper, and wrote, giving it to Jerry. By the time the pack was fully strapped, the widow returned; refreshment was provided, and the pedlar's visit was over—gone, like other things, into the past. But the widow and Jerry had lasting signs of its reality, and to each it marked an epoch.

To Jerry it was like a magician's visit. And what did he mean? Only birds had wings. Surely—no, it could not be that he had used enchantment. That night, when all was still and dark, Jerry crept out of bed, lighted his candle, and stole noiselessly out. Past the witch's door, down the steep steps, and into the warm, sleeping kitchen. As usual, all the things woke. They were alive and grinning at him as he drew off his night clothes, and craning his neck, managed to see the back of his shoulders by the aid of the little glass in which the widow had seen herself clad in soft grey. The glass laughed. He saw so many things, and knew the thoughts which lay behind. Jerry breathed deeply. The fear was gone. There was nothing but the sturdy brown shoulders. He stretched his hands behind to make sure, and, greatly comforted, went back to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

A KISS FOR THE GOOSE-GIRL, A MASTER FOR THE WITCH, AND A PRISON FOR THE FAIRY

THE gifts were distributed next day, but long after the snuff was finished and the ribbon worn out, the charm of the pedlar's visit lingered. It shed its halo round Jerry as he dug turnips in the dull November morning, whistling gleefully, and working like a small engine. Farmer Chubbe, passing by, patted his shoulder, and one or two of the older farm men smiled approval and gave words of advice. Nancy brought him a hunch of cake. Altogether Jerry felt that the world was good, and his brain, helped by mechanical exercise, worked rapidly. He wondered very much what the pedlar had meant by his remark about wings, but it was secondary to the great idea which had been suggested. To go to London, to go into a fairy tale. Why, here, of course, was the reason for saving his pennies. For the future Betty must wait. He would save and save, and then, one day—of that he would ask the pedlar—he would start off, like the miller's son, to seek his fortune, and come back a great gentleman, with gifts for Betty and all. Oh, but the fairy tales were coming true. Here was romance, at his very feet, only waiting to be picked up.

Time flew rapidly that morning. He was in the thick of calculations, when the field gate opened and Paul came towards him. The friendship between the children had ripened quickly. Jerry, strong and sturdy, had acquired a sort of protective affection for the slim delicate boy, combined with admiration for his knowledge of the world and great folk. Paul, utterly free from snobbishness, accepted the homage

in the spirit of a knight, whose squire may or may not be as well born as himself, but by virtue of fewer years is his servant for the nonce.

To Betty, both boys were slaves, as becomes a knight and his squire to the princess they serve, and proved herself a veritable little tyrant. In her absence they were as men friends, discussing matters unbiassed by feminine influence.

"Did pedlar come, Jerry?" asked Paul eagerly. He knew, of course, the whole history of the pennies, and was as interested almost as his friend. Jerry nodded, and, not neglecting his turnips, plunged into details.

"And, Paul, he says I shall go to London one day. So I am going to save and save, and then I shall set out one morning and seek my fortune." Paul listened entranced, yet with the shadow of a doubt in his mind.

"But what will you do, Jerry, in London? It's so big, and the people I don't think are so nice as the Cloudesley people."

"Oh, that wouldn't matter a bit," said Jerry. "You see, I think I shall go straight to the king and ask him if he wants a servant, and I should tell him that I was only a poor little boy, but my daddy was a gentleman. And I'd work, oh, I'd work so hard for him, and I'd watch, so that no one should ever hurt him, and I'd fight for him." Paul, every doubt dispersed by Jerry's earnest conviction, interrupted eagerly.

"I know, Jerry. You can be one of the king's pages. He always has them. I know a boy who's one." Jerry's eyes opened wide—he almost forgot the turnips.

"And I tell you what." The interest was being fanned into flame. "When you're ready, I'll ask my father to help you, or—I know—a splendid plan," he moved closer, with eyes lit with the delightful idea, "I'll ask Mary—she'll be coming to the Dower House soon—and she'll tell the earl all about you, and perhaps he'll speak to the king, and ask him if he's got room for another page."

Jerry's heart almost stopped beating. Here was a royal road indeed, but a doubt crept in.

"Do you think, will she? Lady Mary, I mean. She doesn't know me. Do you think she'd do that?"

"I'm sure she would," answered Paul confidently. "You see, Mary and I are great friends. I like her almost as much as Betty. Lady Kezzy wants me to marry her some day, but I don't think I shall. Besides, my dad says the earl has other plans. Anyhow, she'll do that if I ask her, I'm sure."

"And you will, oh, Paul, promise you will."

"I will, Jer; here's my hand. We're friends, you know." And Jerry, wiping his earthy hands on his smock, took the slim white hand and shook it furiously, the colour deepening in his little brown face, and the steady brown eyes darkening with affection, and gratitude, and visions, and all sorts of beautiful things. And then Paul had his little bit of gossip.

"I say, Jer, all those people are coming to the Hall to-day. Isn't it horrid? They'll be riding over to our house, and my father and I are asked there to dinner, and I've got to go because Francis Crewe's coming; and oh, Jer, I do hate him so. He's sixteen, and he thinks he's a man, and he smokes and drinks, and all the time he only looks silly. No one likes him, but he's got lots of money. I think he's a sneak."

"Is he? What does he do?" Jerry was hearing wonderful things.

"Oh, he's cruel to animals for one thing, and he's not truthful, and—and—oh, all sorts of horrid things. I wish he wasn't coming." Jerry could offer no advice. Bad boys of sixteen were creatures apart from his world. He consoled his friend to the best of his ability, but Paul was in the lowest of spirits, and inclined to be irritable on the subject.

Cloudesley, unchecked by edicts, watched the arrival of the guests that afternoon. In his travelling berlin, with postillions gay in the gorgeous Fleet livery of green and gold, arrived the Marquis of Fleet, accompanied by Captain Culpepper, cousin and heir to the title, also by his friend, Sir Francis Crewe, and his son. The Duke of Flemington drove tandem,

and was followed by his brother, Lord Henry Sands, a master whip, whose curvetting, prancing horses and miniature groom, hanging on behind for dear life, afforded infinite interest to the gaping villagers. Colonel Mortimer Hayes drove four-in-hand, bringing the remaining guests with him.

So, amidst whirling dust and prancing horses, voices, laughter, and the music of horns, the gay party drove through the great gates, up the long chestnut avenue, and the Hall was once more ablaze with light and colour, with the flashing of gorgeous liveries, the reflections of dark, polished floors, the gleam of great mirrors, the glitter of silver and glass, and many-hued flowers.

Jerry watched with the others, a host of new emotions roused in him. He had no envy of Paul, but the thought would come that Paul was only a little boy like himself, and yet, between their lives, was a great, great gulf. A longing to see the wonders that wealth can bring possessed him. There were marvellous tales afloat of my lord's arrangements for the entertainment of his guests. A certain amount of discontent at the dull routine of the cottage, and a distaste for turnips and cows came upon him; but, above all, something stirred newly, possibly assisted by the pedlar's words, something which grown-up people would call ambition, about which hung a veil of romance, giving other things a commonplace and ugly look.

Excitement reigned in Cloudesley. Sport was good, and all day long, from fields and covers, came the pop-pop of distant guns. The village was full of strangers, London servants, valets, grooms, and the Cloudesley Arms did a thriving business. Now and then some of the older guests, those who had visited the Hall as young men, would step inside the inn parlour to chat with its landlord and drink a glass of old port.

"Same as your lordship used to like when you was a young man, and stayed at the Hall when I was butler there. I had it from the cellars of His Grace of Wynderley, when his grace's town house was sold to pay the debts of his son."

And the visitor, shaking his head in sympathy with His Grace the Duke of Wynderley, would plunge into gossip of the town, Mr. Chubbe listening deferentially, adding his own little bits of knowledge, and enjoying it all with the zest of one who lives away from the great world.

A new demon had woke in Betty, a demon of curiosity and love of admiration. Her aunt declared that the last state was worse than the first. No lessons were learned, needlework became well nigh impossible, so hot were the little fingers. In vain were tasks assigned. Betty seized every opportunity to prink herself out in the new ribbon and walk in the street, or lurk in corners near the inn, or, better still, to find an excuse to visit the inn parlour. Mrs. Chubbe was at her wits' ends.

"Drat the company at the Hall, say I," was her constant remark, "the sooner they're gone the better for Cloudesley. A pack of idle, grinning idiots, an' their masters aren't much better. Nothin' to do but turn the girls' heads, which ain't much trouble, Lord knows, an' make 'em neglect their work, an' that's no difficult thing, neither. It's like Bedlam itself. Folks seem to ha' gone mad."

But no words affected Betty. The child's temperament needed personal experience; the lesson could only be learned by herself.

It was one afternoon towards the end of the week. The red curtains of the inn parlour were drawn snugly. Shooting was over for the day, and most of the Hall folk had returned. The Marquis of Fleet and Sir Francis turned in for a chat and rest. Here they were joined by Paul and young Francis, who brought a message for his father.

The room was comfortable, the gossip interesting, and the two boys lingered, unforbidden. Mr. Chubbe, bustling in and out, produced a cobwebby bottle, Sally brought glasses, and the rich, crimson liquid glowed through the thick cut glass, making the room sweet with its luscious aroma.

"P'raps the young gentleman will take a glass." The inn-

keeper, bottle poised in the air, glanced towards the armchair in which the young gentleman lolled, regardless of the marquis's evident disapproval. He accepted with a curt nod. The marquis frowned, Sir Francis took no notice, and the landlord glanced towards Paul.

"No, thank you, Mr. Chubbe; my father doesn't allow me to take wine." The marquis nodded approval and the incident passed. The gentlemen sipped their wine slowly and appreciatively; then, gossip being exhausted, donned their heavy cloaks, set out, Sir Francis bidding his son not to be late for dinner.

Paul hesitated and would have followed, but the other plucked his sleeve, and he stayed. The landlord returned to the cosy room rubbing his hands—there was a sting of frost outside—refilled his guest's glass, and would have taken up the conversation but that a farm hand arrived with a message. Mr. Chubbe rose hastily.

"I hope, gentlemen, you won't take it amiss if I leave you for a few minutes. The boy tells me there's something wrong wi' one o' the cows."

"All right, Chubbe," Francis Crewe nodded carelessly; "you go along and see after your cow; we're all right."

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you. I won't be long." Francis Crewe looked after him.

"Old fool! Who wants him, if he'll leave his wine behind him. Come on, Paul, don't be a milksop. Hold out your glass."

"I don't want any, Francis; I don't like it."

"More fool you." He filled his glass, tossed it off, and refilled it from a second bottle.

"Old Chubbe knows good wine. So do my dad and the marquis. Wonder how much of the story is true, or whether he nobbed it from the Cloudesley cellars."

"Francis!" The child's tone was indignant. "How can you think such a thing?"

"Ah, Master Milksop, you'll find out things when you're

as old as I am. Wonder how long the old boy'll be. It's cosy enough here."

There was a silence. Paul wandered out of the room in search of Betty. That young person, secure in the kitchen, had somehow got wind that grand folk were in the house. Her aunt kept vigilant watch, but the sudden illness of the cow put her off her guard. With a command to the child to stay where she was, Mrs. Chubbe followed her husband to the scene of action. No sooner was she alone than every injunction slipped from Betty's mind. Paul was there—she would go and find him. She stepped cautiously across the long passages, no one was about, and reached the parlour without meeting a soul, Paul having gone the front way.

All was silent. Had the gentlemen gone? Betty's heart sank; all that trouble for nothing. She gently pushed the door and looked in. The room lay in shadow, but a sudden leaping flame revealed its single occupant, and Betty moved further in. The handsome dark face was turned from her, and for some moments she watched, wondering at the fine clothes, the sparkling ring he wore, and the whole graceful negligence of the figure. It was the first time she had seen a gentleman so close.

He turned, and stretching out his hand for the bottle, suddenly stopped. "Hallo! Where did you spring from? What's your name?"

"I'm Betty, please sir."

"Betty! And who's Betty when she's at home?" The child stared.

"I'm just Betty, Betty Chubbe."

"Oh! so you're Betty Chubbe. Well, then, Betty, since you've sneaked into a gentleman's room, you'd better speak to the gentleman. Come here."

He beckoned with the sparkling finger, and the child came slowly forward. Here was excitement indeed. He looked her up and down, from tiny elfin feet to elfin gold curls glinting in the firelight, and there was something in the bold, in-

solent glance which made Betty, child as she was, shrink back. The boy saw the movement, and catching her dress, drew her nearer. The thought passed through his mind that he would like to see the fire flash in those dark eyes, the colour deepen in the cheeks.

"D'ye like wine, Betty Chubbe?" he asked; "your dad's wine, kept for gentlemen." She shook her head.

"I don't know, sir, I've never tasted it." He filled a glass, and handed it to her with a mock bow.

"Now taste, and say 'Your health, sir.'" The rosy wine, the soft firelight, the glamour of the adventure seized the child. With a little bubbling laugh she took the glass, and sipped, repeating the words.

"Is it good?" he asked, still staring at her, and Betty nodded rapturously.

"Go on, then—finish it." She sipped again and again; then set the glass down.

"I don't want any more, thank you, sir." Already the rich liquid was doing its work. Some of its crimson mounted in the little face; the dark eyes grew brilliant. Francis Crewe could hardly take his glance from the beautiful picture.

"Come here," he commanded, pulling her close. He would have taken her on to his knee, but Betty drew back.

"What's the matter? Do you think I'm going to hurt you, little silly?" He put his arm round her, but Betty stood firm, and for a moment he desisted.

"All right, then. Little girls who won't do what a gentleman asks them must be punished. I shall cut off your curls." Had he searched her inmost mind, he could not have hit on a more telling threat. Her curls—the pride of her life. She put up her hands with a gesture of fright. Francis Crewe produced a small pocket-knife.

"Now, then," he drew her towards him by sheer force; "and if you scream, or make any noise, I'll cut your pretty little mouth."

For a moment Betty stood motionless, the colour dying

away, and a look of fear in her eyes. Francis Crewe laughed —a cruel, malicious laugh—and opened the knife. And then Betty's natural temper, heightened by the wine, asserted itself. He drew her close, and pulled a curl as though to cut it. At the sudden pull, fierce anger rose in the child. Swooping suddenly, she pounced on the hand which held her, and in a second had fixed four little sharp teeth in it.

With an oath, the boy dropped the knife, started back, disengaging his hand, and in the sudden pain and anger lifted it to strike. Betty, white and shaking, glared at him. Every trace of fear gone—fierce rage devouring every other emotion. The blazing eyes, the thin crimson lips, the intense whiteness of her skin, seemed to strike him anew; the lifted arm dropped, and he laughed maliciously.

"You little vixen, but you're not going to get off like that. I won't steal your curls, nor hurt you, but—damme—if you shan't give me a kiss before you go. Two, if you don't do it willingly." Every nerve in Betty's little body tingled with rage. How dare he tease her like that? She, Betty Chubbe, the spoilt child of the inn, who gave her kisses where she chose.

"Now, then." The boy advanced with a malicious smile on his face. With a choke of rage, Betty sprang forward, doubled up her small fist, and hit him square on the mouth. Laughing spitefully, he caught both hands. A scream, she knew, would probably bring assistance at once, unless they all happened to be with the cow, but Betty preferred, if possible, to fight her own battles. Moreover, she would have to own to humbled pride.

"I'll bite if you kiss me," she said. But her enemy was undaunted.

"Oh, no, you won't, I shall hold your head." He seized her, half laughing, half in real anger. The child struggled, kicking and fighting with all her strength.

"Little spitfire," he cried, as he held her tightly, and stooped to take the threatened kiss.

There were footsteps along the tiled passage. For the hundredth part of a second he paused. It was enough. Betty gave in and cried out. In an instant Paul was across the room.

"You—you coward! You bully! All right, Betty, don't cry, I'm here. He shan't tease you any more. Let her go." The older boy relaxed slightly, but still held her.

"Let her go?" he answered with a sneer. "Who says so? She was rude to me, and—"

"Let her go, I say," shouted Paul. "Let her go, or—or—"

"Or what?" sneered the other.

"Or—this." Paul's fist was perhaps not so strong as Jerry's, but it was strong enough to cause his opponent to loosen his grasp. Betty slipped away; the tears were coming now, thick and fast.

For a moment the big boy dropped back; then, with a snarl, sprang forward, and in an instant the pent up hatred between a vicious nature and a proud one burst its bonds, and the two were locked in a fierce struggle. Round and round the room they went, struggling, tumbling, swaying, breathing heavily, then gasping in long drawn sighs. Over went the table, chairs fell, ornaments, even the curtains came in for a share, and Betty fled, wildly screaming for help, all pride forgotten in the terrible skirmish.

In less than five minutes the sick cow was deserted for a worthier cause. Servants and hinds blocked the doorway. Mr. Chubbe, suddenly entering, came in full collision with the combatants, but they saw nothing, knew nothing. Round and round, again and again they went. Francis Crewe, tall and slight, and with the advantage of years, had distinctly the best of it, but Paul, though his nose was bleeding, and the diamond ring had cut his forehead, held on, his breath coming in long gasping sobs.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, for God's sake, what's it all about?" Almost distracted, Mr. Chubbe made another onslaught, but was again repulsed. Now two of the ostlers rushed in, and

by sheer force separated the boys, holding them tightly in spite of their wild struggles to free themselves.

"Leave go, sirrah," cried Francis Crewe fiercely. "What do you mean by interfering in a gentleman's quarrel?" The landlord came forward.

"No, no, sir. You can't fight any more; or if you must, take your quarrels elsewhere. And you, sir," he turned to Paul, "for shame, a little boy like you."

"You don't understand, Mr. Chubbe." The haughty tone was worthy of an older man. "This gentleman and I have a dispute, about—about—" he hesitated for a moment, "about a wager. But I acknowledge we had no right to settle it here. I apologise for myself, and—" he looked across at the other, who nodded sulkily, "and Mr. Crewe. As for the damage—" glancing at the disordered room, "of course, you shall not suffer."

The landlord stared, half laughing at the haughty tone. He turned it off with a few words, and Paul, still with the grand manner of one older, advanced to his opponent, who, still held by each arm, glared like a tiger.

"The quarrel, Mr. Crewe, is not ended."

"No, by God," cried the other passionately; "but," the tone changed to an ordinary boy's, "we'll fight it out another time." It was over. With a sullen ferocious snarl, Francis Crewe shook himself free, and snatching his hat and cloak, strode out. The room emptied, and Paul turned.

"Good-night, Mr. Chubbe. I couldn't help it. I can't tell you what it was about, but I'm sure you and Jerry would say I did right." He held out his hand; the landlord, sorely puzzled, shook it heartily, and helping him into his cloak, saw him to the door.

Back in the dark, disordered parlour, he stood for a moment looking vaguely at the havoc wrought—yet seeing nothing, for his thoughts were far away. Something in his niece's tone and appearance convinced him that she knew more than

came to the surface. What was she doing there at all? Mr. Chubbe shook his head slowly and meditatively. "Wimmen, wimmen—" he ejaculated musingly. Then, suddenly realising, stooped and picked up some broken bits of glass, ruefully regarding the overturned bottles and stained carpet.

"There'll be the dickens to pay over this here business," he murmured. And his wife entering suddenly, cordially assented.

"I'll have no more of it," she said. "That child's at the bottom of this. To-morrow, as early as I can get her dressed and you can start, off she goes to Mrs. Plumtre's. She's asked her an' Jerry many a time, an' if widow'll spare him, he shall go too. He'll keep her in order, the saucy baggage. An' she don't come back till every man-jack o' they fine gentlemen be gone. A pack o' lazy good-for-nothings, quarrelling an' fightin' here like a couple of pothouse fellows, an' draggin' in the little count. Som'un'll have to warn his father. There'll be mischief done else, or I'm much mistook. You'll ha' to see the count, master." Her husband nodded.

"This very night, missis. I'll have no blame i' the matter." Within an hour, Mrs. Chubbe had consulted the widow, packed Betty's bundle, and made arrangements to ensure early departure. For once, Betty, completely subdued, acquiesced without a murmur. She had learned her lesson, though in learning came bitter humiliation.

The count, wise man, took little outward notice, cautioning Matthew Chubbe to do the same. But for the next two days he kept his son at home. The wound, and a certain amount of feverishness, were sufficient reasons. On the third day both father and son left for London, and the fight was forgotten, save by the two most nearly concerned. The smouldering enmity between the boys had blazed up and been extinguished. It had yet to burn itself out.

Once more the cottage in the lane was tenanted only by its mistress and the black cat. Strangely enough, both missed

the little square figure on the three-legged stool. Tibbie purred round the kitchen, finally making a journey upwards and returning unconsoled.

The widow found the drawing of water and the chopping of wood irksome tasks; even in washing dishes she turned, expecting to see a chubby brown hand stretched out for the dripping utensil. It is true that the grey dress gave her food for thought—no light business is the garment with which Sally intends to charm her admirer—and when at last it was put on, the red ribbon and lace tucker complete, the widow eyed herself in the bit of glass with a flutter of her heart and a strange emotion, something like the emotion which might represent love in a starfish.

There was a goose for dinner. Its savoury odours floated out into the damp November morning. Inside the cottage burned bright wood fires. Even the front room couldn't help feeling cheerful, and the armchairs, drawn close to the hearth, each with its crimson hassock and cushion, grinned at each other as though they knew all about it. The widow wound up the jack, popped in potatoes and greens, gave a last stir to the apple sauce, a last peep at the bubbling pudding, mended both fires, and stood waiting for the familiar knock.

The minister paused almost imperceptibly before entering, but, in that pause, she knew that her new appearance was noticed with admiration. The words of greeting fluttered in her throat and, as the minister took the plump hand in his, laying his other over it in tender possession, something, which in Sally might be called a blush, crept over the fat cheeks, and the widow's blue eyes dropped beneath his ardent glance. With a smile, meant to be encouraging, he led her into the front room, slightly inhaling the fragrance from the kitchen on the way. He lifted his hands in ecstasy as the blazing fire and comfortable table met his eye.

"Home, happy, happy home," he murmured. The widow, flattered and bashfully perturbed at the subtle allusion, bridled, smiled modestly, and backed out of the room to dish

the frizzling goose. Left alone, the minister purred around the room, minutely inspected the spoons and forks, attempted to lift the lid of a bureau, but, finding it locked, shook it, listening carefully for any sound which might betray its contents. The smile dropped from his lips—it had never been in his eyes—and the wild expression of fanaticism changed to one of greed. He raised the horsehair mattress of the sofa, where the widow kept papers, opened the big Bible, and rapidly flicked its leaves, then came back to the fire, and rubbing his hands slowly together, gazed meditatively into its glowing depths.

There is something in the atmosphere which tells of a decision made, a step taken. Though the widow's sensitive nerve was about as much developed as that of a sheep, she was conscious of a difference.

The minister helped her with an air of, "With all my worldly goods, I thee endow," crowning the act with that dainty morsel, commonly known as the "wish bone," and in passing his plate for potatoes, greens, and apple sauce, eyed her with such an amorous look, that the widow's fat hands trembled and the scarlet ribbon fluttered with the unwonted agitation beneath. She regained her composure, however, during the washing of dishes, and took her usual seat with calm expectancy.

Sleep that afternoon had fled the little sitting-room. Great events were about, and after a few minutes the widow fidgetted under the burning gaze from the opposite chair. She closed her eyes—in vain. They opened mechanically. "Tick, tick; tick, tick," murmured the wooden clock on the mantelshelf, as though it said, "No fool—like an—old fool."

Had Jerry been there he would have seen all the furniture come alive in the silence, and wait, grinning malevolently.

The minister nursed a thin bony knee with two thin bony hands, and the widow, breathing hard, dropped her eyes under the bold look. "Tick, tick; tick, tick," went the clock,

like a sledge hammer in the silence, "tick, tick," till five minutes became an eternity, and a kind of hypnotic trance fell over the grey-gowned figure in the chair. "Tick, tick," the hands moved slowly round. Still the minister gazed, and his opposite neighbour subsided into what in Sally would have been a shame-faced ecstasy.

"Tick, tick; whir-r-r-r—" came the warning, then four times the harsh strike, and the silence broke up. With a quick movement the minister sprang to his feet, raised his arms, shook them in passionate gesture, lifted his eyes to the ceiling, and groaned loudly, then flung himself forward on the bony knees and clasped the widow's hand in his.

"Fairest among women—peerless—incomparable, whose eyes are as the eyes of doves, whose cheeks are as roses seen through milk, whose—whose—" Here the minister's similes came to a sudden end. He bent his head and kissed the hand with fervent intensity. The widow turned her head sheepishly.

"This lovely hand, toil-stained with honourable work, bearing the impress of ministry to other's needs; frail, yet strong with the strength of duty done; beautiful hand, happy indeed, thrice happy, the man who possesses it."

There was a pause. Mr. Padden collected his thoughts, the widow made a movement, drew her hand away and rose, trembling with agitation. In a moment the minister sprang to his feet, once more possessed himself of both hands, and drew her slowly, slowly nearer.

"Harriet—lovely name. Charming, graceful—yet linked with one so unworthy. Hagges! Monstrous, incredible mistake. But law and the church provide a remedy." He dropped his voice as the widow, fascinated, drew nearer. "Change it, loveliest of women. Take the unworthy name of one unworthier still, yet who loves thee. Take me, Harriet. I—Simeon Padden, lowliest of the lowly—ask it. Take me—lead me—be my darling—my—wife." Then, with a vague remembrance of the marriage service, "Wilt thou, Harriet?"

The widow trembled like a jelly. In the agitation the front slipped, giving her a rakish appearance. The scarlet bow came untied, even the lace tucker had a frightened droop. The minister lifted her hands, and placing them on his shoulders, held them while he whispered the question again. The widow's lips trembled, the words fluttered, then fell on the silence. The minister threw up his arms, gave a loud triumphant cry, and clasped the grey figure to him. With a deep sigh the widow yielded, and the minister put himself into a pose of delirious joy—head thrown back, eyes upturned, one hand caressing the front laying on his arm, the other encircling the broad shoulders leaning against him.

So the shadows fell, and perhaps even the widow's dull ears heard a magic strain from deep woods and leafy glades. For to the coarsest natures Pan sometimes sings a song of love. But the minister heard it not. There are ears which hear naught but the strain to which fauns and satyrs dance, the music which has no melody, which only calls to the vilest, lowest passions of man.

* * * * * *

In nature's scheme, events small and large are of equal value. The wooing of an ant is a small thing, yet, doubtless, to the ant, the all-important event of the universe—to nature also, since it is an event on which hangs the fate of many generations of ants. Had any one told my Lord of Cloudesley that the episode of that Sunday afternoon bore any relation to his own concerns he would have been dismissed in haughty silence. What are important matters to the ant are worlds apart from the lion's daily life. Yet Nature has equal need of each. There is no such thing as comparison in her philosophy.

My lord's guests were enjoying themselves. The brilliant autumn days proved irresistible, and my lord's hospitality was lavish. My Lady Karen made a stately chatelaine, and her sister, always a lover of life and gaiety, found the change from the dull Dower House vastly to her liking. It was a fortnight

before the party broke up, and then by twos and threes, till only Lord Henry Sands, Captain Culpepper, and Colonel Mortimer Hayes were left. Though so few guests remained, rigid etiquette still prevailed, not an iota of the stately ceremonial was abandoned even though the party was shorn of its great nobles. But now the last evening was come. The morrow would see a general exodus from the Hall—servants, guests, hostesses—and Cloudesley would return to its ordinary life.

In the great drawing-room my Lady Karen sat by a blazing fire of logs. Her embroidery frame stood before her, and the long jewelled fingers flashed among the tinted silks. She wore a purple velvet dress, its folds lying on the huge white rug in gleaming richness. My Lady Kezzy, in stiff grey brocade, sat opposite, a book on her knees, and a little pink flush on her still round cheeks. In the soft light of many candles, the room looked the picture of wealthy comfort.

The click of an opening door roused both ladies. The elder raised her eyes from her work, then dropped them carelessly. Lady Kezzy lifted her head with a small smile to greet her brother. He came leisurely down the room and took up his position on the hearthrug between his sisters, almost facing Lady Karen. In his hand he held an open letter. There was that in his manner which betokened absolute mastery—the attitude of one superior to all around him, accustomed to perfect obedience, and brooking not the slightest opposition.

"Karen, I wrote a fortnight ago to Mother Monica." He paused, my lady raised her eyes, and her sister, catching a look in them, loosened her hold on the book, which slid unnoticed to the ground. The earl continued: "To-day, I received her answer," he tapped the letter slightly with two fingers; "doubtless, you can surmise its purport."

Lady Karen carefully lifted her frame to one side and rose. Then, crossing the room, she picked up the fallen book, replacing it on a table. Lady Kezzy's eyes wore a frightened look and she glanced timidly at the dark, stern face of her brother, then at the equally haughty one above her. The earl

followed each movement and repeated the question. Lady Karen faced him; there was an implied protection in the long jewelled hand resting on the back of her sister's chair.

"There can be but one answer, Edward," she replied coldly; "your terms are lavish, and the Order is poor."

"Yet it seems that the Mother can afford to dictate her own terms," he answered harshly. "She accepts, it is true, but conditionally." Lady Karen's lip curled.

"Accepts conditionally? Pray, who is Mother Monica that there should be any conditions in accepting as pupil the daughter of the Earl of Cloudesley?"

"As you say, there are no conditions in accepting my daughter as pupil." Lady Karen raised her eyebrows.

"Then?"

The earl's voice was smooth and even, his words courteous, yet something told of depths beneath. Lady Kezzy listened breathlessly.

"It may be that I did not fully explain myself. Mother Monica is more than satisfied with the terms offered for board and tuition. She says," he referred to the letter, "'I am overwhelmed with the munificent terms of your offer, although they are only what might be expected from one who has always been our friend and benefactor. Lady Mary will be received with open arms, for her own sweet sake, and also for yours, my Lord of Cloudesley, but—'" The hand holding the letter dropped, and the earl resumed his own tone, level—cold. "The reverend Mother has scruples, conscientious ones probably," he added, with a slight sneer. "She makes the condition that Mary shall spend her holidays away, and that, at nineteen, she shall live for a year in the world, in order, she says," here again crept in the note of sarcasm, "that she may know something of its temptations. After that, if she is willing, and I still hold the same views for her future, she shall be received back as a novice."

He paused, and gazed steadily into the face confronting him. Lady Kezzy made a slight sound, and half rose, but her sis-

ter's hand on her shoulder gently pushed her down. Lady Karen stepped forward, as cold, as haughty, as masterful now as her brother, yet her first words were tactful, even gentle.

"Edward—I hoped—I thought—that this wild, *wicked* scheme had been abandoned. You have not mentioned it for years. In the first pangs of sorrow, the first heat of anger, I could understand. But surely, time, with its healing powers, has cured the wounds. Would you wreak your vengeance on a defenceless child? It is not worthy of you, Edward. Surely you, head of one of the oldest families of England, can afford to be above such pettiness." The earl smiled grimly.

"You mistake me, sister. My laws, once passed, can be broken only by myself. For me exist no barriers. As you say, I am above such pettiness. Nevertheless, in this case, as my opinions differ not by the fraction of a hair's breadth from what they were eight years ago, I do not change. Had Mary been a boy it might have been different. Had you, Keziah," he turned fiercely to the cowering grey figure in the shadow, "obeyed my will this would not have happened. As it is, the title passes," he shrugged his shoulders, "I hardly know to whom. And Mary, with her dowry, and every penny —yes—every penny," he repeated slowly, "shall go to enrich the Order of St. Quentin, and, incidentally, the Convent of St. Monica. This is my will. See that it is respected."

With a gesture of finality he turned on his heel. A sudden movement from the dim corner caused him to halt in some surprise. Lady Kezzy, moving with quick, agitated steps towards him, threw herself on her knees, the tears in her soft blue eyes, the sweet lips quivering.

"Brother, oh, my dear brother, think—think, before you do this thing. Think of Mary's bonny face, her pretty ways, of her love for us, for Cloudesley, for you. Would you shut her up in all the pride of her youth and beauty, deny to her God's gifts of love, of wifehood, motherhood? Edward, it is a living death you offer her; good indeed for those who have tasted the bitterness of life, for those weary ones who seek

rest, for the storm-tossed, who long for peace; but for Mary—"

"Tush!" ejaculated the earl, drawing his hand away. But Lady Kezzy was fairly launched. Impatiently, almost against his will, he was compelled to listen.

"Ah, brother, don't do it. Bury your pride, your hatred. Let Mary come here with the knowledge that it is her home, while it is yours. Give her—"

"Stop." The word came like thunder, and Lady Kezzy, spent with the unusual emotion, shrank back.

"Do you dare to speak thus to me, the head of the house? You are mad—as mad as those women who brought the curse upon Cloudesley; as mad as she who forsook all I gave her—all this!" he made a comprehensive gesture, "for poverty—shame; as mad as your sister, who crept like some scullion to a forbidden tryst. Mad—as you were, thirty years ago, when you refused Ross of Ardelimar. For that you suffer now. I tell you, Keziah, had you married him, this might have been averted, for your son, had you had one, would, through his father, have inherited Cloudesley. As it is, Ross is old—childless, to all intents and purposes—and Cloudesley—" for the first time emotion showed in a stifled groan, "Cloudesley—descending in a straight line for ten generations, passes to an unknown heir."

There was a slight pause. The earl's breath came thick and fast; Lady Kezzy, in her chair, wept quietly. My Lady Karen, resting her arm on the mantelpiece, gazed scornfully from one to the other. Presently my lord spoke again, and his voice was as usual.

"To-night I write to the reverend Mother, accepting her terms. My daughter shall see the world, shall know something of it, and if she finds it hollow, the better pleased will she be to seek safe shelter."

"And if not?" Lady Karen broke in, her voice as even, as emotionless, and frigid as her brother's. My lord turned with a shrug.

"If not, then Mother Monica will have herself to blame. And now, ladies," he glanced at the ormolu timepiece which stood on the richly carved mantelpiece, "I must leave you. My guests, no doubt, are wondering at my absence."

He bowed courteously, but with a touch of sarcastic mockery, with the knowledge, too, of unlimited power to crush whatever dared to pit itself against his will. Yet, even as he raised his head, my Lady Karen confronted him, her dark eyes almost even with his—fearless, purposeful, decisive. For a moment they looked at each other, then she spoke.

"Edward, is this your final answer?" He inclined his head.

"And there is no alternative; no other way?"

"None whatever." Lady Karen paused.

"And in the event of your death?" she asked at length.

The earl smiled.

"I am still a young man, my sister, not yet forty. I shall not die. Yet I have made provision. Mary will obey my will or go penniless. Her dowry, in any case, passes to the Order."

"She will not be penniless while we live," retorted my lady sharply. Again the earl smiled.

"You may perhaps remember, sister, that you are some fifteen years my senior, also that the Dower House and its revenues are not at your disposal."

"No." Lady Karen's voice was still hard and cold. "Yet Mary will inherit our personal property."

"A beggarly three hundred a year," sneered my lord.

"Sufficient with our savings to keep her, should love prove stronger than obedience." The earl turned fiercely upon her, his dark face working.

"My God, Karen, do you dare to taunt me? You, who have always been a model of discretion and wisdom. Listen, both of you." He brought his hand down with a crash on a small table near, making its silver ornaments ring. "The subject is closed. My word is law. I acknowledge no

superior. I brook no opposition." Lady Karen, undaunted, spoke again.

"You may not acknowledge a superior, Edward. Nevertheless, you are led by one who is stronger than you, who strives for a great cause. It is Father Francis, who has worked on your better feelings, and done this wicked, cruel thing." The earl's eyes blazed with wrath. Had a glance killed, my lady would have said no more. For a moment he stood irresolute. Then, with a mighty effort, he subdued his anger.

"Again I repeat, I own no superior. Father Francis has my welfare at heart, the welfare of my family. It seems to me that the matter is at an end."

"Not quite." Lady Karen drew herself to her full height, her small head poised itself haughtily, the dark eyes glowed. "I also own no superior. I also make my own laws, and in this matter, Edward, I stand firm. It is I—and—" she hesitated, glancing at the grey figure in the shadow, "Keziah—against you and Father Francis." The earl smiled grimly. He was himself again. "So. We understand each other, sister. On this matter, it is war to the end."

"War to the end," repeated my lady.

"Then time alone will show the victor. Once more, ladies, I bid you good-night."

He strode calmly to the door, opened it and let himself out. The two women watched. Then, as the door shut, Lady Karen gathered up her silks, closed her frame, and with a curt good-night, followed his example. For a few minutes Lady Kezzy sat on. Then rising, she opened the great window and stepped on to the terrace. A frosty moon hung in the heavens; bathed in its silvery light, and seen through a mist of autumn, Cloudesley lay dreaming, a picture of peaceful happiness. Yet beneath, my lady knew, lay sorrow, weariness, cruelty, all the ills of this mortal flesh. She sighed as she gazed on the beautiful scene; here, at least, she was at liberty to throw off obedience and conjure up remembrance.

All the past rose before her. Mima, the dear young sister who had taken her life into her own hands, and for love, defied her brother's anger, counting the world well lost. Where was she now? Lady Kezzy sighed again. Surely, surely, sometime she would come back. The tears flowed thick and fast; through the mist little Mary's face laughed into hers, and my lady clenched her small fingers. Never—never should Mary suffer as those other women had suffered. And yet, might it not be better to suffer and love than know nothing but unemotionless monotony?

She lifted her head with a perplexed look. Out on the clear air Church Clock struck midnight, and to my lady's ears came the sound of Pan's piping. Light, airy, as the tripping of fairies' feet, heavy as the music of fauns and satyrs, melancholy, lonely, yet with a note underneath of something different—a note which stirred in my lady's heart, dispersing some of its misery. For through nature runs ever a trickling thread of gold, lighting the whole, and men call it Hope. So my lady turned to the house, and, gathering up her book, sought her room.

CHAPTER IX

OF SOME ODDS AND ENDS WHICH PIECE THE STORY TOGETHER

CLOUDESLEY was itself again. My lord's guests had scattered to the four winds of heaven, and Mr. Chubbe had been dispatched to fetch home Jerry and Betty. Reluctantly Mrs. Plumtre let them go.

"For they be dea-ar children, farmer," said she. "Little miss do like her own way, to be shu-ar; but then, 'tis natural."

Betty's tongue, as usual, went apace. Jerry even broke in with tales of the wonderful holiday they had had. Mrs. Plumtre was evidently an adept in the art of spoiling, and Miss Betty responded nobly. Jerry, it appeared, had held long conversations with his hostess, gleaning much information as to the running of an inn, the baiting of horses, and the management of grooms.

"I think," continued Jerry solemnly, "that when I'm grown up, quite grown up, you know, after I've been a king's page, I shall be an innkeeper. Mrs. Plumtre says she'll learn me the business. That's what her son ought to have been, only he went away."

Mr. Chubbe nodded gravely. He knew the wretched story. A spoiled child, money wasted and borrowed, and the fear of a debtor's prison, mingled with shame and a certain respect for his mother, causing a night flitting—all so common, yet none the less sad.

"Of course," went on the quiet little voice, "I shall go to London first; I told pedlar I would. But I've promised Mrs. Plumtre to look for her son, and I'm quite sure I shall find him some day."

Mr. Chubbe gazed abstractedly before him, clicking his tongue so many times at Jenny, the mare, that she turned a wondering head. Betty babbled on unheeded.

"So you're going to leave us, laddie," he said, after a long silence. Jerry looked up.

"Yes, Mr. Chubbe. You see, I must earn some money; I want such a lot, and I want to see London. But I shan't go yet, not till I'm twelve, an' I shall often come back an' see you all." The farmer shook his head and sighed thoughtfully.

"Well, well—'tis right, laddie. Young things must try their wings. But 'tis hard on the old birds when the little ones leave the nest. Yes, 'tis cruel hard," he added musingly. Then suddenly changing his tone, "Come, Jenny, come. Mostways home, lass; put thy best foot foremost."

And Jenny flew like the wind, causing the children to hold on tight, screaming delightedly, and the journey ended amidst peals of laughter, clattering hoofs, and shrill childish voices, gleeful for home and for the welcome awaiting them. Lazy Betty found it hard to go back to primer and slate. There was much pouting and many tears before the old Adam was finally mastered. Mrs. Chubbe declared that she was worse than ever, and administered whippings freely.

Jerry, on the contrary, delighted in the regular exercise again. Much had happened in his absence. Fields were cleared, stubble ploughed in, and most things prepared for winter rest. He was free now to enjoy the book. At Mrs. Plumtre's there had been no time, although he had carefully packed it in his bundle. Now he returned to it with keen satisfaction. The reading, at present, was beyond him, but the pictures were understandable.

There was one which appealed strongly to his imagination. An old castle, standing high on a mountain side, lone, bare, grand in its isolation; a very setting for a tale. Jerry peopled it with giants, fairies, knights, and all the fairy folk of the stories. There were other pictures, too, which he knew

were places belonging to the castle. A great hall, full of marvellous things; antlers (Jerry called them horns), pictures, tall dark benches, and a fireplace so big, that he wondered if they could ever find enough sticks to fill it. In front lay two dogs, giving it a touch of reality. There were other views, but the one which attracted him most was evidently part of the gardens. Lawns, with spreading trees, sloped to a running stream, and on one was assembled a group of people who interested Jerry keenly. A tall man, dressed in a funny kind of dress, short-skirted as a girl's, with strange stockings and something thrown round him like a shawl. A little boy dressed in the same fashion stood by him, his arm round a dog's neck. Jerry decided that they must be Indians. A lady sat near, probably the little boy's mother, but with nothing very remarkable about her. Underneath was written an inscription, and carefully spelling it out, he read, "Lord Ross of Ardelimar Castle, with his wife, and son and heir, Gervaise."

Over these Jerry pored at every available opportunity, till he had pieced the pictures together and made a whole, which perhaps differed as much from the original as Ardelimar Castle did from Cloudesley Hall.

Life was growing very full indeed for Jerry. The book only formed a small part. There was work, plenty of it, as the winter broke; and work meant pennies, even shillings. Then there was my lady's school, and here also was so much to be learned that Jerry's head fairly buzzed.

He was having drawing lessons. Lady Kezzy, detecting a budding genius, supplied them, also materials, and the small pupil took to it as a duck takes to water. Modelling clay was also procured, and casts which grinned at him while they eluded every attempt to copy. Jerry made up his mind that he would be master, and though the difficulty was so great, each effort was a step nearer. One day, he thought, they'll have to give in and let me copy them.

Then, too, a letter had to be written to Margery. His writing began to look quite grown up, and when at last the letter

was closed and sealed with a seal borrowed from the school, and some of the precious pennies spent for postage, Jerry began to feel that London and independence were indeed looming near.

It was in the spring time that a change came, the change which was but the first of many. Ever since Jerry had lived in the cottage he had been used to hearing the widow's name mentioned, sometimes with a mysterious smile or a half laugh. At first it had heightened his suspicions that she was a witch, but latterly, since commonsense told him that that was but a fancy belonging to his childish days, he had sometimes wondered what was the reason. It may be added as a slight detail that the old lurking doubts sometimes revived, at night for instance, or when the broomstick was absent from the cupboard, more particularly in that silent hour when he sat on his three-legged stool modelling clay, while the widow dozed and all the inanimate things came alive.

One Monday afternoon Jerry came home from work. He changed his heavy boots for thinner ones—the widow allowed no dirt in her house, and Margery's teachings still lingered—had his tea, and took up his usual position. The widow finished her washing up and subsided into the red-cushioned chair. Jerry worked on, then suddenly became conscious that all was not as usual. Nothing had woke up, and glancing quickly round, he found that the widow's blue eyes were open and watching him. It was embarrassing, bringing back memories of that bitter time so long ago. Too polite, however, to say anything, he went on with his work till supper time. The next evening was the same. On the third the widow spoke.

"Is it a bowl you're making, child?" He said it was, and politely showed her the wonderful curves and hollows, so beautiful yet so difficult of achievement. How much the widow understood was doubtful, but she creased and uncreased her cheeks and mouth, and nodded many times, still watching. On the next two nights it was the same, till Jerry

began to wonder if some wakeful imp possessed her. On the Saturday came the explanation.

"Little boy." Jerry looked up, surprised at the hesitation, also at a certain something in the voice. Something softer, more thoughtful, even intelligent.

She sat forward, grasping both arms of the chair, and, gazing into the fire, shook her head doubtfully.

"I dunno rightly how to tell you, an' that's the truth." Jerry dropped his modelling and stared. Mrs. Hagges removed her glance from the fire and looked sheepishly downwards. Never had Jerry beheld so many creases. On the ample spread of gown before her she drew patterns with a fat forefinger. Presently she spoke again, in a would-be coquettish tone.

"What would you say, little boy, if I told you I was agoin' to git married again?" In moments of excitement the widow's polished accents were apt to lose themselves.

"Get married!" gasped Jerry. It was beyond conception. Sally or Nanny might, probably would do so, but an old woman, and an ugly old woman, he told himself. "Get married!" he repeated stupidly. She nodded coyly.

"'Tan't anything after all to be surprised at. I'm only thirty-five, or thereabouts." Mrs. Chubbe might have disputed the fact, but to Jerry, thirty-five was much the same as seventy-five.

"There's Hester Dyke, up at the village there—" with a jerk towards the window, "a'most as old as me, an' never wed before, an' she's got married, an' a fine figure of a man is he."

The comparison was not, to Jerry's mind, favourable to the bride elect. He rather liked Hester Dyke; she had often asked him to go and see her, and the widow always had some reason against it ready. But Hester never passed him without stooping and kissing him, thereby adding another to her train of admirers; and the worship of a small boy for beauty far

exceeds that of many an older man. He turned matters over. If Mrs. Hagges were really going to get married, why—naturally some one else was about to do the same thing."

"Wh—who—are you going to marry, m'am?" he stammered out at length. The widow hung a bashful head.

"Why, child, his name's Simeon, which, though it's out o' the Bible, ain't a very pretty name. But there—you can't have everything. Simeon—Simeon Padden," she repeated musingly. Jerry's heart sank. He knew the long, black-coated figure slightly, and, with a child's true instinct, disliked its owner. The minister's would-be dulcet tones, the touch of his lank, kid-gloved fingers on Jerry's head were disagreeable, almost repulsive. Quickly the little brain worked, framing a question.

"Will you live at Mr. Bray's, m'am?" She tossed her head disdainfully. Even a worm has instincts, and there had been enmity between Harriet Hagges and Hester Bray.

"La, no, child. He'll come here. It's not far from Meetin' House, an' I'll lay he'll be a sight more comfortable than George Bray can make him. Pork an' beans for his dinner, an' cold for his supper—an' that's all he or Hester know about a man's stomach. No, no, he'll be better here; an' I couldn't leave the cottage, I've lived in it since I was first married, an' that's twenty-five years come June next." Which was curious when compared with another statement. There was a silence. Another question was trying to frame itself in Jerry's mind, but it did not get beyond a few hesitating words.

"And—and—when?"

"When will it be?" Mrs. Hagges finished the sentence. "Well, 'twon't be yet awhile. Though if I did but say the word 'twould be to-day. Only last Sunday he says, 'Harriet, name the happy day.' But there's a new rug to be made, an' the chicks comin' on, an' the potatoes to be planted. No, 'twon't be till summer, nohow."

Jerry breathed; it was a respite. Margie, of course, would be back then, and they would live together with the pigs and

chickens till he was twelve, which was not for nearly two years. And then, hey, for London City and all its wonders!

"And now," said the widow, sitting back, "don't ask me any more questions."

She put her head against the cushion; Jerry returned to his modelling, his head full of new ideas. In a moment the silence fell and the inanimate things woke up. Oh, how they grinned and jeered! They had been listening, no doubt, and Jerry felt almost inclined to join with them.

Mr. Padden confined his courting to Sundays. He had never visited the cottage on week days, and neither he nor the widow saw any reason for altering arrangements. So that, to all intents and purposes, things went on in the same way.

In its monotony, time flew. Morning after morning Jerry woke wondering if the day would bring Margery's letter, night after night he went to bed wondering why it had not. Didn't Margery love him any more, or was she sorry she had promised to come back? Mrs. Chubbe suggested that she was married, but her husband shook his head, and when Jerry left the room, pursed up his lips and whispered a grim word.

"Nonsense," said his wife, turning nevertheless a shade paler. "Ill news travels fast. We should have heard. Mark my words, Matthew, something's happened to prevent her writing. Some fine day she'll turn up." But Mr. Chubbe still shook his head.

Over the hills and into the woods crept Spring again. Nights grew warm and short; Church Clock only struck five dark hours; north wind and east wind shouted round him till one day west wind and south wind drove them laughing away. But Church Clock's face was grave that day. In vain did the merry winds play about his tower. Grave, too, was the brilliant yellow face which rose beside him that summer night, grave and cloudy.

"Church Clock, Church Clock," it cried, "are you still watching?"

"Still watching, friend," came the quiet answer.

"Ah, then you don't know—you don't know."

Church Clock turned his grave face.

"I know, friend, I know. The prairie grass rustled and whispered it to the east wind; east wind told south wind, and hand in hand they told it to me."

"But I saw it," cried the Moon, "I saw it, Church Clock. Oh, listen—listen, while I tell you. Last night I rose across the seas. Fair rolled the wide prairie under my silver light. A little band of pioneers had made their camp; they were going north to a friendly tribe with whom they hoped to trade. The tribe had sent an escort, but it was not strong enough. Even as I rose, among the high grass came the flutter of feathers, the glint of spear heads. Ah, Church Clock, Church Clock, how can I tell it? They killed the men and took the women captive. And the children, little ones like those sleeping yonder—" He buried his face in a passing cloud, and for a space there was silence. Church Clock ticked slowly on, then struck the hour.

"Be cheered, friend," he said; "they, too, sleep—dreamless, happy sleep. Mother earth bore them, and sooner or later all things return to her brown bosom. They shall come again, even as all things come again. They but rest awhile."

"But Margery—oh, Church Clock, what of Margery and Jean?" Church Clock paused before answering.

"It's hard, friend, it's hard. Yet it will pass, as all things pass."

"But it leaves marks, Church Clock."

"Aye—it leaves marks. Nature works by cruelty. Only love dares to fight against it. And the two for ever wage war against each other."

"And who is the stronger?" asked the Moon eagerly. Gravely, solemnly, answered Church Clock:

"Love, friend. For love is stronger than anything. Love governs the world. Margery will come back, for love will draw her. And Jean will pass behind the curtain to where

love waits. Dost understand, friend?" And the Moon, emerging from a bank of dark clouds, shone brilliantly.

"I understand, Church Clock," he whispered; "I understand."

CHAPTER X

THE MINISTER COMES TO THE COTTAGE AND THE KNIGHT RIDES AWAY

THE widow never alluded to her love affair again. Jerry sometimes wondered if he had dreamt it all. There was nothing to show the contrary. But it was no dream. One late summer afternoon the widow met him at the garden gate. It was unusual, but Jerry, wholly unsuspicious of the real cause, thought perhaps Margery's long looked-for letter had arrived. She wore her Sunday dress of grey, the red ribbon fluttering gaily at her throat, her face was very creasy, and the double chins seemed to convey an extraordinary feeling of satisfaction and well-being. She beckoned with a fat forefinger, and whispered mysteriously:

"Tea's in the parlour to-night, there's hot cakes; an' someone's in the kitchen."

Margery—oh, how Jerry's heart beat. He flew—opened the kitchen door with a face of beaming delight, and there, in the centre of the new cloth rug, stood a long, black-coated figure. In the hideous reaction, the child's mind refused to work, the room swam before him, and only the repulsive touch of those thin bony fingers on his head recalled him to his surroundings. The minister turned up the whites of his eyes, and extending the remaining hand towards the ceiling, began a ranting tirade which the occasion warranted. When, towards the end, he advanced and would have embraced him, Jerry recoiled.

"Father—lovely word! Child—" he placed his hands on Jerry's shoulders and gazed with devout fervour into the

little upturned face, "let me hear that word. Say after me, 'Father.'" Jerry shook his head.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but you see I couldn't call you father, because my real father's gone away, and you are not my father."

For the fraction of a second something crept into the black eyes, something sinister, evil, and as Jerry shrank back, it was gone. He moved away. The minister smiled, then sighed deeply.

"Alas! some day—" he clasped his hands together, lifting them high, "some day—" He broke off as his wife entered, bashfully beaming, and flew to her side with all a lover's ardour while she drew the cakes from the oven. Holding the dish before her, much in the fashion of a sacrifice, she led the way; the minister followed gesticulating, and Jerry brought up the rear. The meal was superb; never had Jerry seen such a spread, and the newly-married couple did full justice to it. There were interruptions, it is true. The minister, every now and then would catch the plump fingers in his, carrying them to his mouth, playfully pretending to bite them. The widow—never would Cloudesley bring its tongue to call her by any other name—retorted archly, "Get along wi' you—do." Sometimes this was accompanied by a sportive box on the ears, provocative of further gallantries. Jerry kept his eyes on his plate. It was not amusing, and certainly very silly. He ate his tea, scornfully superior, yet with the uncomfortable embarrassment of a child who sees its elders behave in an undignified manner.

He grew used to it, even to the occupation of the armchair by two instead of one. No longer did the widow doze peacefully. There were whisperings, pauses, and more whisperings, and Jerry missed the quiet hour. No longer did the inanimate things awake, no longer did Tibbie wear the inscrutable expression of a witch's cat. In fact, to a certain extent, the air of mystery was gone from the house. The minister made work. There was mending and darning, to

say nothing of extra dainties to be prepared. The widow showed herself in new lights. Active she never was, but the comfortable, leisurely tread disappeared. There was hurry in it now—much to be done, and very little time to do it in. Mr. Padden came punctually to his meals, and the widow strained every nerve to be ready. The loud, unpleasant voice lifted itself continually in grace, prayers, or general rhapsodizing. How Jerry hated it! He counted the months to his twelfth birthday—twenty months, a lifetime. It was unfortunate, too, that it came in November. He would so much rather have started in the early dawn of a summer morning. The new state of things at the cottage soon began to be an old state, so quickly does habit adapt itself. And then again, gradually, imperceptibly, till it was accomplished, came another change.

The minister developed a cold. The widow abdicated from the red-cushioned chair, and the quiet hour was devoted to strong mustard and water, hot gruel, and linseed poultices. The ailment lasted several days, and the widow's heavy feet toiled wearily up and down stairs, from kitchen to back'us again. After a few days the cold mended, and the minister went about his business as usual. The event marked an epoch. The days were lengthening; duty called Mr. Padden, and he tore himself away.

But it was not duty; the few days spent without seeing Hester Dyke had developed the old liking into something warmer. She was lost to him, and, as usual, the desire for a thing grows in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining it. Knowing her power, she kept him at arm's length, yet always with a suggestion of relaxation postponed. The dulness of the cottage and his wife, palled upon a restless, uncontrolled nature, and the minister took to spending his days away—where, he alone knew. The widow asked no questions, but once more occupied the armchair in solitary comfort, and Jerry, on the three-legged stool, looked for old times. In vain. She never slept again; her eyes sought the clock, her ears listened

to catch the faintest sound, for at any time the minister was liable to return and demand a meal. The peace of the cottage was gone, and Jerry grew to realise that calm monotony had distinct advantages. Also a strange note crept into the atmosphere already tuned to a different key, the note of fear, although it was not for many weeks that he recognised it.

As the summer came nearer, the minister's absences grew more and more prolonged. There were days when he only came in for his dinner and supper. Yet at times he would hardly stir from the house, and it was at those times that the widow's face wore a different expression. It hardly ever creased and uncreased nowadays, and sometimes, to Jerry's childish mind, it seemed to be smaller, less florid, and the blue, lack-lustre eyes even duller and more aqueous.

That summer the geese looked after themselves. Betty was getting a big girl, her aunt said, and must go to school all day; Jerry, too, was worthy of better work.

He was at his old occupation, digging potatoes, one autumn morning. In the distance a plough was making its way across a field, the fresh brown earth contrasting with the pale, unploughed stubble. The trees, half naked, showed lacy outlines against a thin blue sky, white-clouded. Beech woods surrounding the Hall were rich in gold and red, and cabbage fields, in the near distance, changed, gleamed iridescently, like great scales of a giant fish.

Jerry, as usual, worked contentedly, filled with the beauty of the day and all sorts of speculations as to the glorious future drawing so near. Something entered into his thoughts, something unpleasant, causing, what Mrs. Chubbe called, "a wet blankety feeling." Raising his head he knew the cause. The minister, passing, had seen him, and now lifted the wooden gate and turned in. Jerry worked on, conscious that the black figure was approaching—had reached him, and was watching.

Still he kept on, vaguely determined that his visitor should be the first to break the silence. For some minutes he worked steadily down the row, digging and lifting out the earthy

masses, shaking them till the brown potatoes were free to be cast on the stacked heap. Mr. Padden followed him; the unctuous smile was on his lips, but the blazing eyes were dulled to commonplace; he was there for a purpose. Presently he spoke.

"Boy—for what does man work?" Jerry raised himself, spade in hand, slightly puzzled by the question, but ascribing it to the minister's usual speech.

"I expect people work to keep their families. Mr. Chubbe does, an' I work 'cos I like it, an' 'cos I want to get money." Mr. Padden fell back; he was not used to direct answers. Still smiling suavely, he looked down at the sturdy figure, and Jerry started, in such contrast was the cold evil look behind the thin smiling lips. It vanished so quickly that he wondered if it had ever been there.

"Aye, to be sure, to be sure." Then with a deep sigh, "Alas, that it should be so; that man should work for no higher reward than useless dross. Still—since you desire such paltry recompense—this yellow gold you prize, I trust you may find it. I bear you no ill-feeling." Then, dropping his tone to a confidential one: "Does the worthy farmer compensate you sufficiently for this arduous toil, this labour in his vineyard?" Jerry nodded; something seemed to be rising in him, and he knew he must be careful. Just at that moment he felt that he hated the minister more than anything in the wide world.

"Mr. Chubbe pays me a lot," he said, and the listener smiled patronisingly.

"Ah, youth, youth! To whom a shilling is wealth, a sovereign the mines of Golconda! And what do you call a lot?" he asked softly. Jerry answered shortly.

"A shilling a week." The minister threw up his hands.

"Truly the eyes of youth are large." He turned, still with the insinuating smile, which irritated Jerry almost beyond endurance. "What do you do with this great wealth, child?"

"I give it to Farmer Chubbe."

"Good—good." The minister rubbed two thin hands together, then stole nearer Jerry, and placing both on his shoulders, sighed and shook his head.

"Ungrateful boy! Well, well has it been said, 'How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is, to have a thankless child.'" Jerry stared; although by this time accustomed to the minister's ranting, he wondered why he was chosen for audience. After a minute's gesticulating and groaning, Mr. Padden assumed a parental tone of mild reproof.

"No doubt it is through ignorance that you have committed this outrage. Did you never think of her who has been a mother to you, who has clothed and fed you, warmed you, supplied from her scanty stores your needs? And yet," the voice rose shriller, "you do not trust her. You give your worldly goods into another's keeping—one to whom you are but a hireling, who may at any time be called from this world. And, though he cannot take your pittance with him, yet so small a thing might be swallowed in the bigger sums." Jerry listened—bewildered.

"Do you mean that I ought to give my wages to Mrs. Hagges?" The name slipped out unnoticed. The minister groaned deeply and inclined his head.

"Oh, but I couldn't do that," cried Jerry, in eager distress. "You see, Mr. Chubbe's been so kind to me. He always adds something to it." Again the minister groaned, and shook his head dolefully.

"Alas!" he began in a tone of mourning, "must I then return and tell her that she must suffer? That the child she cherishes is false?" He paused; between bewilderment and troubled wonder, Jerry's face was a study. The minister watched warily—then sighed, and half turned.

"I go, unhappy messenger of ill. Ah, well—so be it. 'Tis nature." Slowly he moved further, yet still watching Jerry's troubled face. Presently it cleared, and he spoke.

"If you like, if you really think I've vexed Mrs. Hagges,

I'll ask Mr. Chubbe." The minister smiled sweetly and stepped near again.

"Nay, nay, child, obey the dictates of your own heart; it will respond to a noble impulse. Bring your savings; lay them at the feet of her who loves you. She will guard them as she has guarded you." He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, lifted the other in benediction, sighed, groaned, smiled benevolently, and at length betook himself on his way.

Jerry breathed again. Yet all the glory of the day had vanished; work had lost its zest, and he was sorely troubled in mind. Had he hurt the widow's feelings after trying so hard to be always gentle? Did Mr. Chubbe really only think of him as a little servant? The tears started in Jerry's brown eyes. If it were really so, why, of course, he would willingly hand over the savings, and forego the bonus; though he thought of it with a pang.

He hardly saw the minister before Saturday and the widow showed no sign of emotional disturbance. When the farmer paid him as usual, being extra busy, the fact that Jerry took the money went unnoticed. The widow was baking cakes when he returned, bustling in and out in a breathless hurry. It was not until the crisp, brown buns were lifted from their tins, and the larger cakes put in, that she found time to drop into the armchair, wipe her hot face, and adjust the front; Jerry took the opportunity.

"If you please, m'am, I'm very sorry indeed; I can't tell you how sorry I am." The widow stared in amazement.

"What's the matter, child?" then suddenly she started forward with an agitated look. "Odds drabbit, boy, you haven't broken the best teapot?" Jerry hastened to reassure her, and she sank back relieved, mopping her forehead, and fanning herself with her pocket handkerchief.

He tried again.

"You see, m'am, I didn't mean to be ungrateful." The handkerchief dropped, as the widow listened wonderingly.

"But he said you thought I was unkind, so, please, I've brought it this week. And will you please save it for me?"

"What is it, child?" She stared at the silver in the brown palm. "I can't be bothered with your money!"

It was Jerry's turn to look.

"But I thought— The minister said you were vexed because Mr. Chubbe kept my money. He thought you ought to keep it. And I'm very sorry, but I'll always bring it now." The widow's face changed as he spoke. Bewilderment turned to understanding, understanding to a look of consternation, and then came fear. She sat forward, and drew Jerry near.

"Don't you give me the money," she whispered, "I don't want it. But—" The grasp tightened on Jerry's wrist, the blue eyes wore a strained look, and he had to stoop to catch her words. "You're a good little boy, I've always said so; an' you won't tell him, him out there—" she jerked her head towards the lane, "that I told you, will you?"

She waited breathlessly.

"No, m'am," said Jerry.

"Tell him you've made up your mind not to give it to me. Tell him you're afraid I might lose it, or—or—take it. Will you?" And again Jerry assented. It was all very strange; he could not understand; but the widow's anxiety impressed itself upon him, and when he next met Mr. Padden alone, he put on a brave front and told his determination.

Well for Jerry that the minister's face was turned from him. The look on it might have daunted an older boy, but he made little comment beyond a rambling invective against ingratitude, love of money, and want of trust. And on the following Saturday Jerry returned his money to the usual banker, who, probably thinking it forgotten before, took it without a word, and so the incident passed.

As the autumn went by the widow changed visibly. The portly figure grew thin, the rounded cheeks fell in and hung in flabby folds. They were quite incapable of creasing or un-

creasing now. One by one the comfortable double chins disappeared, and the plump hands showed wrinkles, even knuckles pushed themselves into sight. She still baked and cleaned at high pressure. There was always a good meal ready when her lord and master chose to arrive. She only occupied the armchair now when she and Jerry were alone. The minister claimed it as his right; but on Sunday afternoons, though Jerry was not there to see, all the kitchen furniture came alive. For on that day Mr. Padden slept in the front room, and the widow, her dishes washed, stole an hour from the past, and dozed peacefully in the red-cushioned chair.

A child floats innocently in troubled waters, only vaguely conscious of discomforts. Looking back from the vantage point of a grown-up, Jerry wondered how he could have been blind so long. All the village knew, or guessed. Mrs. Chubbe asked a great many questions, then pursed up her lips and shook her head mysteriously at her husband. Betty, all agog for exciting gossip, and, womanlike, much quicker at piecing it together, informed Jerry that "Aunt Martha says the minister wants Mrs. Hagges's money, and Uncle Matt says she was an old fool to get married. But I don't know why, Jerry," wrinkling up the black brows in a perplexed manner; "I think she was quite right, and I'm sure the minister's very nice. Isn't he?"

Jerry disagreed, but evaded the question. He didn't like the minister, but he was sure Mr. Chubbe was wrong. Had he not wanted Mrs. Hagges to take charge of Jerry's own money?

That winter he really felt as though he were growing up. In a few more months he would be twelve. The golden future hung dazzling before him, and his heart leapt as he thought of it. The shillings were accumulating. What a lot there must be, he sometimes thought; it was impossible to keep exact count. He talked it over with Paul, though, strange to say, he never mentioned it to Betty. Paul kept the secret.

He, too, had begun to dream of his future, but it was a future further afield than Jerry's. The next few years were mapped out for him, and spring brought a change. Betty coming home from school one afternoon saw him hurrying towards her.

"Come into the woods, Betty," he said excitedly, taking her books from her, "I've got something to tell you."

They turned across the meadows towards the belt of trees beyond, unconscious of aught but each other. Mrs. Chubbe, from a window, saw them pass, and stopped in the midst of her sewing with a curious expression, half pride, half perplexity. The pride was justified. Betty had grown tall; the girlish form showed no ugly irregularities. Slight, graceful, thin, it promised future beauty. The long bright curls tumbled over her shoulders, and as she lifted her face to Paul's, the dark, deeply fringed eyes shone in response to something he said. Mrs. Chubbe sighed and puckered her forehead. Then, as they passed out of sight, caught snappishly at the work and stitched vigorously. Her thoughts also moved in the future. The girl and boy walked soberly across the field.

"What were you going to tell me, Paul?" asked Betty excitedly. "Was it about the belt?" For Paul had promised as a birthday present a certain buckle which he had seen in London. He looked into the beautiful face, so full of vivacity and eager interest. An onlooker might have been almost more struck by his own. Features too clearly cut for pure English, skin olive brown, and black hair pushed back from a thin oval face, in whose dark eyes every emotion of their owner's was reflected. They were smiling now. "The buckle's coming, Bets," he said. "To-morrow, I expect." She laughed and clapped her hands.

"Will it really be silver, Paul?" He shook his head gravely, and her face dropped.

"Oh!"

"Silly princess," he cried gaily, pulling her curls and call-

ing her by the name she loved, "I wouldn't give you silver. It's—guess!" She shook her head and pouted, the tears gathering in her eyes. Paul laughed.

"Betty, it's a gold buckle. With little, tiny, crystal stones. What do you think of that?"

For a moment it seemed that she was too amazed to think at all. Then, as the glorious reality dawned upon her, she gasped—

"Oh, Paul, do you really, really mean it?" He nodded. "Oh, you dear! you dear!" She flung her arms round him, kissing him rapturously, and flew off to dance away some of the wonder, returning breathless and panting.

"And will it really come to-morrow? Oh, I shan't sleep a wink to-night." Then, as a sudden thought seized her, "Paul, do you think Aunt Martha will let me wear it?" Again he nodded gravely.

"Yes, I'm sure she will, because, Betty—that's what I really wanted to tell you—I shan't be here your next birthday, nor the next."

"Won't be here?" The dark eyes grew wide with astonishment.

"No, I'm going away. In two days most likely, it's all been settled so quickly."

"Going away," repeated Betty blankly.

"Yes. My father thinks I ought to go to your great English school, and in the holidays we're going to travel and see different places. I think it will be very nice, but—" He hesitated and glanced at her. They were deep in the woods now, where solitude reigned. He drew her down on the soft mossy ground.

"Betty," he had his face turned from her, "I—I wonder—" A roguish expression took possession of the brilliant eyes; a little smile rippled over the scarlet lips. Child as she was, she was yet woman enough to read his thoughts. Suddenly he turned, and threw away the tufts of moss he had idly plucked.

"Betty, will you miss me very much? I shall you. I shall always be thinking of you, and wishing you were with us when we're in strange places." Betty grew grave.

"I shall miss you, Paul, dreadfully." He seized her hand.

"I say, Bets, when I come back I shall be nearly a man, and you'll be nearly grown up. Will you marry me then? You won't be a princess, you know, but you'll be a countess. Will you? Promise you will. Oh, Betty, do—do—promise." She drew provokingly away and laughed. Already a knowledge of the power of her beauty was awakening in the child.

"Oh, Paul, how can I promise such a silly thing? I don't know what I shall feel like then."

"But, Betty," he pleaded, "if you feel as you do now, will you? No—" he held her hand tightly, "I shan't let you go till you promise." She laughed teasingly, and tried to withdraw it.

"Let me go, Paul. You're hurting me."

"Promise, then."

"Oh, well—I promise—perhaps, I'll see. Now let me go." Reluctantly he unloosed the little hand.

"Betty, you won't forget, will you?" Again she laughed, refusing to say more. Paul waited, watched the piquant changing face, then suddenly put his arms round her, and drawing her close, kissed her passionately. Betty was furious. Crimson with rage, hot and breathless, yet half laughing, she pulled herself away.

"You rude, horrid boy," she cried. "You're as bad as—as—" He understood, and stopped her.

"No, Betty, I'm not. I kiss you because I love you. He only wanted to kiss you because—because—" He hesitated, finding himself in unknown depths.

"Because?" asked naughty Betty innocently.

"Because—oh, Betty!—because you're so pretty."

"Am I?" It was balm, coming from Paul. "After all, I think I do like you a little, and—perhaps—if I don't really find

a prince—perhaps, when I'm quite—quite—grown up, I'll marry you, Paul."

He drew her arm within his till they reached the fields, then dropped it. A consciousness of keeping this secret was upon him. It was too beautiful to be spoken of, even Jerry must not be told.

And so it came about that the knight rode away carrying with him a certain hope, a glorious dream of the future. And the swineherd watched him go. He, too, had his secret hope, his goal. Only the goose-girl's future was dim. A veil hung over it, a thin, misty veil; but behind it lay the most wonderful future of all, the future which is unknown.

So, too, Mrs. Chubbe, stitching steadily, wove a dream of another future, a dream which was so brightly coloured, so golden hued, that she rose, and putting by the work, vowed she was a foolish woman, as bad as a girl of eighteen.

CHAPTER XI

HOW THE GOOSE-GIRL CLIMBED A LADDER, HOW THE FAIRY GODMOTHER MADE THE SWINEHERD AN OFFER, AND WHY HE REJECTED IT

BETTY'S birthday had slipped into past things. The buckle was now worn without great consciousness, and Mrs. Chubbe's musings resolved themselves, for the present, into a definite form, a form which, to use her own phrase, "set Cloudesley by the ear." Neighbours shook their heads; those more intimate, remonstrated; inferiors tossed their heads at such presumption; even the farmer occasionally had his doubts. But Mrs. Chubbe held her ground, though, in spite of her outwardly undaunted aspect, there was a horrible inward sinking, when gossip, having spread till it reached the ears of those in authority, the high slung barouche from the Hall stopped one morning at the seldom used front door of the inn, and my Lady Karen stepped out, escorted by a gorgeous footman, who knocked vigorously, and departed with a rueful glance at his knuckles.

Mrs. Chubbe, accompanied by Sally and the farmer, hastened to open, and with many creaks and groans, the heavy oak was set back and my lady entered.

"Good morning, Chubbe," she said graciously; "good morning, Martha," and the graciousness was not quite so gracious. "I have come to speak to you on a certain matter which has reached my ears." Mrs. Chubbe curtseyed again, and led the way.

"Will you step into the kitchen, my lady," she said, inwardly shaking with dread of the coming interview. She drew an armchair to the fire, but my lady waved it aside.

"No, thank you, Martha, I prefer a high-backed one, and not so near the fire."

Mrs. Chubbe hastened to make the change. A very small voice inside her whispered, "Courage, Martha—stand firm; you know what hangs upon it." And with renewed strength, the farmer's wife faced the great lady and prepared for battle.

"A rumour has reached me, Martha," began my lady in a tone of "such presumption would be unheard of"—"a rumour so improbable, so utterly impossible, that of course it is not true. Yet, although I have traced it to its various sources, and severely reprimanded those from whom it originated," the high forehead puckered slightly, "yet, as they persist in asserting its truth, I feel that it is my duty as your friend and well wisher, to tell you what people are saying. You will then naturally be in a position to contradict such unfounded statements." She paused; Martha, standing on the opposite side of the table, rested her finger tips on the table. They were white with the pressure, every muscle taut with suppressed agitation. My lady opened her lips, but the farmer's wife was first.

"I'm sorry, my lady, that you should have heard it from anyone but me an' my husband." Lady Karen raised her eyes haughtily. Mrs. Chubbe, still staring at her fingers, went hurriedly on.

"I expect, my lady, it's about Betty you've heard. You see, my lady, she's getting a big girl, eleven last May, an'—" Lady Karen stopped her with a gesture.

"Kindly come to the point, Martha. Is it true?"

"Yes, my lady." Mrs. Chubbe lifted her eyes and looked straight across the table. Lady Karen was silent for a minute. Indignation struggled for mastery, but my lady's pride subdued it. Only in the cold high-bred tones could it be detected.

"I think, Martha, you hardly understand the responsibility you are incurring. Naturally you are proud of Betty; she has more than her share of beauty. Indeed, it is almost a pity.

But to take her out of her sphere, to give her an education such as—as—" pride stopped her for a moment, "such as my lord is giving his daughter, is not only presumptuous folly, but cruel, wicked pride. I trust that, before I leave you, I shall be able to convince you of this." Mrs. Chubbe was silent. "Betty is a great favourite of my sister's," went on my lady; "it has always been our hope that, when she was old enough, she should take the place that you once held so satisfactorily, and stay with us till she married. But if you persist in this—this absurd notion," my lady's tones grew more emphatic, "she will be quite unfitted for such duties. Indeed, I could not see my way clear to taking her, or," with an air of finality, "of recommending her to my friends."

The farmer's wife stood straight. My lady, in the high-backed chair, resting her shapely arm and well gloved hand on the table beneath her, rapped impatiently. Mrs. Chubbe found her voice.

"It's very kind of you, my lady—and my Lady Kezzy—she's always been kind to the child, and indeed—indeed, my lady, we're grateful—very, very grateful. But—" again the pause—again my lady's quick tap. "But me an' my husband thought that—my lady, we've thought of keepin' her at home, later on, I mean. It'll be lonely, my lady, without her."

"Tut-tut," was the impatient reply. "No more lonely for you than for other people. So—" she rose slowly, "I am to understand that you persist in this folly, that Betty is to be sent to the convent, to be educated with the daughters of peers, who will look down upon her and despise her, to be educated above her station in life, to be taught habits of which she will never know the need, and given ideas which will unfit her for this village. Take care, Martha, Betty's looks alone are a responsibility; you are taking a greater one upon yourself. The time will come, perhaps, when you will be lonelier than if she were living in safe and honest service; then, perhaps, you will wish that your vanity and pride had never prompted you to try and raise her above the

state of life to which she was called. No—" she raised her hand, and made her way to the door, "don't come with me, I can find my way out. I'm disappointed in you, Martha Chubbe, bitterly disappointed."

She swept across the kitchen and down the stone passage, Martha following humbly. Mr. Chubbe, emerging from some secret haunt, opened the great door, and without another word, amid a rustle of silks, a flutter of feathers, and a perfume of some subtle essence, my lady passed through, and entered the carriage, surrounded by a gaping, curtseying crowd of villagers.

"Was she very angry, missis?" asked the farmer, following his wife into the kitchen.

"Ah, she was indeed. An' you can't blame her neither. Come to think o' it, 'tis presumption to send the child to the convent where my Lady Mary is. But there—" Mrs. Chubbe poked up the fire, put on fresh billets of wood, and exhausted a little pent-up temper, "if the Mother'll have her—an' she says she will—your money's as good as my lord's, an' my lady's no need to say as Betty'll go wrong because it's spent on her. She won't be the first girl who's climbed to the top o' the ladder. An' there's others who've climbed down, which I could have said, only for not wantin' to hurt her feelings more'n could be helped."

Having eased her mind of such radical sentiments, Mrs. Chubbe called together maids and niece, and prepared to dish the dinner.

And now indeed did Betty's near future begin to unveil itself and take shape. She was to go after the summer holidays, and for once she revelled in new clothes. Frocks and bonnets galore, gloves and sandalled shoes, fine white stockings, and a pile of new handkerchiefs; the only bitter drop in a cup of sweetness—for to Betty's lot fell the hemming of them. But they were done at last. The wooden box was packed, the final solemn injunctions delivered by Mrs. Chubbe,

and Betty sent off to an early bed, accompanied by the unusual business of a middle-week bath.

But at the last her courage failed. The sight of Jenny and the cart containing all her worldly possessions, the early breakfast, the arrival of Jerry, who was to go with them and return as company for the farmer, combined with more than the usual tartness on her aunt's part, brought reality to the child, and the tears burst forth, frightening Mrs. Chubbe into amiability, so rare were they.

"I don't want to go," sobbed Betty, throwing herself into the farmer's arms. "Oh, Uncle Matt, I don't want to. I'm afraid of—of—all—those ladies." Mr. Chubbe patted her solemnly on the back, and swallowed many times. His wife came to the rescue.

"There, there, Betty child, dry your eyes. 'Tisn't for long. An' think what a grand lady you'll be soon."

"I don't want to be a lady," wailed Betty.

"Nonsense," retorted her aunt; then, coaxingly, "why, 'tisn't like you, child, to be afraid; an' there's no call to be. There's the sisters; they'll take care of you. An' the reverend Mother; she's as kind as kind. An' then there's Lady Mary—you love her, you know."

"Oh, yes," came between the sobs, "I—I—love—Lady Mary, but—but—oh—I shall be—so—so lonely."

Consoling and coaxing prevailed at length, and Betty, with swollen eyelids and a very red face, was kissed and lifted into the cart.

The sweet July morning, helped, in spite of recent assertions, by gleeful anticipation, soon revived doleful spirits. Betty's tongue found itself, and the goose-girl was quite ready at the end of the first mile to wear, for a time at least, the garments and habits of a princess.

Mistress Loneliness comes in many forms, but few know her as she really is; Betty, that night, between convent walls, amid strange faces and strange surroundings, fancied that

she knew her intimately. Matthew Chubbe and his wife, lacking the sound of tripping footsteps, the ripple of light laughter, the sweet imperious voice, told themselves that she had come to dwell with them indefinitely. But they were wrong. She wears many masks, and unveils herself to few.

In deep woods, by flickering firesides, under the stars in his little garret, for many, many months, she had dwelt with Jerry, and he knew her as she really is, loving her, as all must, who meet her heart to heart. For she brings with her dear ghosts of the past, sweet memories, loved voices, tender, fragrant scents, while about her float airily a whole host of fairies—the fairies of fancy, of beautiful thoughts, of shadows, dreams, of song and melody. Ah, surely with Loneliness the sound of Pan's piping rises clear and strong, for those who know her, love her more dearly when she comes hand in hand with Nature.

But the Loneliness that dwelt in the cottage now was no longer a friend. Paul gone, Betty gone, and this stranger who had come in the place of the quiet, restful Loneliness he knew and loved so well! He counted the months to the time when he should leave it all behind. The pedlar would come once more, and Jerry would ask him the best things to do, and then at any time he could start.

The widow had changed greatly. Even to the child's unobservant eyes it was apparent, so thin was she, and the blue eyes grew daily dimmer. There were red rims round them, too, and dark patches beneath. Jerry wondered if she were ill. Gone was the peace, gone the atmosphere of homely comfort, even it seemed that the kettle no longer sung. Tibbie lived outside, and the chirping cricket had found another home. Somehow it seemed to the child that the minister's ranting meant something different to the actual words, which at no time could he understand thoroughly. Sometimes, too, at night, he fancied he heard the sound of crying, and once he woke with the echo of a scream in his ears.

There were actual discomforts too. Though the minister

had better food than Jerry had ever seen on the widow's table, their own was poor, and none too plentiful. Contrary to old times, the widow piled his plate with all there was, but ate little herself, though Jerry, noticing it one day, beseeched her to take more. She shook her head.

"No, child, no; seems like as though I'd gone off my vittles lately."

There was economy, too, with sticks; Jerry spent what time he could spare gathering them in the woods, but even the charm of that was gone. There was no time to loiter with Loneliness, for sticks must be had, and he knew that for some reason or other the widow could no longer afford to buy. Potatoes were scarce, indeed, only to be obtained by purchase. For one day, in the autumn, a man appeared, and the widow's winter store was half dug before she was aware of it.

"Minister's orders, m'am; to be sold next market day at Channington."

Jerry, standing by, was surprised that she offered no resistance. Slowly and very heavily she returned to the house, and sitting down in the armchair, told him to fill the pail from the pump. Left alone, a few tears, the tears of middle age, dropped one by one. The marks they leave are different from youthful passions, only an added dimness, a few more lines. When Jerry returned she was setting the table, and the room was in shadow.

"The sun hurt her eyes," she said, but he fancied she didn't want to see what was going on in the garden, and several times, at the sound of the spade, she roused, and put a hand across her ears as though to shut out the sound.

Something happened which put such everyday occurrences as potato selling quite out of his mind. The little jingling chaise stopped one morning at the cottage in the lane, and my Lady Kezzy herself delivered a message for Jerry. He was to go up to the Dower House that evening instead of to the school. Wondering greatly, and slightly afraid lest by an unintentional action he had given offence, Jerry dressed

himself in his best, and was admitted to my lady's presence.

He was shown into a small room, and after a few minutes' wait, she came to him, and for the first time he saw a lady in evening dress. Hardly could he keep his attention fixed for admiration of the rich silk, the flashing jewels, and last, but not least, the round white arms and shoulders, which would have been pretty in a woman ten years younger than my lady.

She sat down by the fire and smiled up at the boy standing squarely before her. There was no trace of nervousness, no fidgetting with his hands, and the grave brown face looking into hers, showed no disquietude in the presence of his betters.

"I'm sure you must be wondering why I sent for you, Jerry," she said presently.

"Yes, my lady."

"Well, you're getting a big boy, Jerry—old enough to know what you want to do with your life. You don't mean to stay in Cloudesley always, do you?"

"No, my lady; oh, no." She smiled at the vehemence in the tone.

"You see, my lady," Jerry gathered confidence, "I'm saving all I earn to go to London when I'm twelve, and that's almost here."

"And then, Jerry, when you get to London?" Suddenly a veil seemed to draw itself away. Out of the mist reality dawned, and he saw his shadowy dream castles crumble away till nothing was left but a little heap of glittering stones. A king's page! Foolish, idle dream, a fairy tale indeed. And with that knowledge came a sick helplessness. What could he do in London? A little friendless boy, alone in a great city.

"I—I—don't know, my lady," came the answer at length, and my lady looked thoughtfully at him.

"My child, you can't set out to seek your fortune nowadays, like the miller's son in the fairy tales you are so fond of. You must work now, and fight, it's true, but in a different way.

Your giants are temptations, and they want more fighting than the giants you read of. Romance," she sighed pensively, "ah, London's full of it, but it is romance which is only romance to those who can read beneath. No, child, you don't understand. But you will some day—at least I think you will. And now—" she roused herself, the dreaminess gone from her voice, "what I really wanted to say to you is this. Would you like to go to London and enter a studio with the idea of working at your art? Would you work hard, and try to make a name, and do us credit?"

Jerry stood silent. It was too great a surprise to grasp at once. Lady Kezzy watched the face she knew so well, watched the light dawn on it, the delight break, and smiled again.

"Well?"

"Oh, my lady, my lady—" Jerry could say no more, but she understood.

"Then I think we may consider it settled; and Jerry, you shall go at once—there's no time to be lost. We must speak to Mrs. Hagges and arrange matters."

Here followed a discussion as to clothes, lodging, and so forth. It was eight o'clock when Jerry left the Dower House.

The night was full of happy dreams, and daylight consciousness brought the knowledge of something delightful ahead. The minister lurked round the cottage that morning, and the widow fidgetted in and out, glancing constantly up the lane. At dinner time things seemed strange. There was no conversation, not even the customary grace. Jerry took no notice. It was not the first uncomfortable meal by many. At the top of the lane he met the postwoman, and matters explained themselves. Of late the letters containing his board money always accompanied some days of extra unpleasantness. He thought no more of it.

On his return, though his head was full of glorious plans, it occurred to him to hope that the minister was away; it would be easier to tell the widow alone. The cottage was still. He took off his shoes and entered in stockinged feet,

across the back'us floor, tip-toeing on the cold bricks. Everything was very quiet, but suddenly a sound rose—a sound which made him stop with blanched face and quickly beating pulse—a low, wailing sound, rising and falling to a groan, a pause, and it rose again, followed by a choking sob.

The kitchen door stood open, and Jerry flew—noiselessly because of the unshod feet—also the occupants were too engrossed to hear. The minister sat in the armchair; he had drawn his wife on his knee, and at the first glance they might have been taken for lovers. But the tears were streaming down the widow's cheeks; cringing and writhing she tried to draw herself from the arm which held her as in a vice.

"Ah—" again the low cry of pain, and Jerry saw the minister's long pincer-like fingers nip her arm.

"Now will you?" he hissed.

The widow shook her head, and the fingers tightened, tightened, till it seemed the nails must meet in the soft flesh. Again the choking sob.

"Damn you, you witch, tell me where it is."

Jerry stayed no longer. As once before, the room turned red, a hot fire surged in him. He only knew that he sprang, that he was cuffing, striking, biting. Then two iron hands held him, held him till he thought he would have choked. Away, far away, he heard the widow screaming. Still he held on with clenched fists. He heard as in a dream the screaming turn to words; it was the widow's voice, changed almost beyond recognition.

"If you durst lay a finger on him, Simeon, to hurt the child, I'll let the village know. Yes, even if you kill me for't."

And suddenly the hold relaxed, something threw him away, the mist cleared, and he saw the kitchen swimming before him. Something black—for a moment he mistook it for the devil—seemed to stretch to the ceiling. Then he knew it for the minister—the minister, with his white face purple and swollen, the unsightly blotches paler, and the black eyes burning like

fire. He was tossing his arms to the ceiling, and the widow cowered in the armchair.

"Damn you—damn you—blast you—you witch." The ranting voice shrilled and rose to a thin scream. "Curse you—you and your brood. I'll make your life a hell; I'll pinch you, and burn you, and torture you, till you're like dust beneath my feet, till you'll wish you were dead." Hissing like a snake, pouring out curses in the high ranting voice now pitched in a piercing key, shaking his fist, and gesticulating so wildly that his listeners could only think of him as a madman, he reached the door, rushed across the back'us, and out to the lane and fields beyond.

The widow sat on, shaking like a leaf, every now and then a tear rolling slowly down unheeded. Jerry pulled himself together, surprised to find no hurts, and made his way to the stool. There was silence, not the peaceful silence of old, but tense, strained. He knew the things were listening, though they showed no sign.

"He's a bad man," said the widow presently. "But he shan't get it—no, that he shan't."

"Shan't get what, m'am?" asked Jerry, puzzled.

"That—" said the widow vaguely. "What he wants."

"Oh!" replied Jerry, more puzzled. A longer silence followed, so long that he fancied she must be asleep. But a big tear dropped on the white apron, and she lifted her head.

"Come here, little boy." Jerry rose and crossed to her side. Lifting her poor thin face, tear-stained and swollen, she peered at him with dim blue eyes.

"You won't leave me, child, will you?" she said piteously. "They're saying you're going when you're twelve. But you won't—" the fingers closed gently on his wrist; they were as the touch of heavy fetters. "Say you won't, little boy. He'll —kill me." There was a frightened look on her face. "You won't let him, will you? Not when you're here. But I'm all alone, an' he wants me away, so's he can have the house an'

my best chiney, an' the silver. But he shan't—no, that he shan't." Just for a moment the voice sounded like that one he had heard so lately, then it fell again to its usual flat monotony, only something grievously sad had got there.

"Say you won't, little boy—oh, say you'll stay."

Ah, the beautiful future, the glorious fabric building so long a time. Fair as a dream city, fairer still as it receded from him. There was a heavy sinking at his heart. He pleaded—argued with himself. How could he refuse my lady's gift? Would it not be wrong? A voice whispered, "No, Jerry boy, no," and it sounded like the voice so long silent, so like that it seemed he heard the words. What did he remember? "You'll hear me, Jerry boy, sometimes. But you must be good and true, ready to help those weaker than yourself."

How the voice rang! Could he? Oh, it was too much to ask. The tear-dimmed, wrinkled face looked piteously at him through a blurred mist, the trembling fingers rested on his beseechingly.

"I told her, my lady—" began Jerry falteringly.

"Yes, I know." There was a sob. "But—I thought—maybe—you'd not be hankering for going. He'll—he'll—" again the frightened look, "he'll—kill me, for sure. Look, child—" She drew her hand away and pushed up the sleeve of her gown. The poor arm, once so plump and round, was flabby now, and on it were bruises; black, blue, brown, in various stages. Jerry recoiled in horrified anger.

"That's what he does when he wants things—an' worse." She rolled down the sleeve, still crying quietly. Again came the dear voice—the well remembered words—and the dream castle shattered and tumbled like a card house.

"I'll—I'll—stay," said Jerry, and just for a moment, the widow sat quite quiet. Then, taking out a handkerchief, she wiped her eyes, put the front straight, and rising, proceeded to lay the cloth.

"You'll be wanting your tea, I'm thinkin'," she said in an ordinary tone.

Jerry, choking down a sob, climbed the stairs to his little room. There at least was peace and loneliness, though Loneliness wore a mask and was no longer her beautiful, lovable self. His death warrant was sealed, and by his own hand. Gone—gone were the beautiful dreams, gone the glorious task of building. No longer would daily toil be sweetened by visions. Life stretched out—dreary, commonplace—full of dull work.

"Oh, daddy, daddy," cried Jerry, kneeling against the window sill, "I can't be a gentleman. I can't do anything but farm work now."

Again came the tender voice, "Be good, Jerry boy; be brave and true, and remember that it's not money and position that make you so."

Slightly comforted, he lifted his eyes. A friendly face looked across the fields at him; and by its side rose another. Bright and round, it seemed to the child's bewildered mind that they said, "Cheer up, Jerry boy. It'll pass—it'll pass."

Ah, but there were hard days in store. Just at first a little wave of satisfied duty bore him up, but as it dropped to a dead level, life indeed became a dreary thing. Labour, unsweetened by dreams, duty, in an ever circling wheel, unrest in the cottage, and for a time a distaste for everything, even the modelling clay. And worse than all was my Lady Kezzy's disappointment. He had gone straight to her at first, only to find that explanation was impossible. How could he tell her that he was staying because the widow was lonely and wanted him? Such a great sacrifice was not to be spoken of. Instinctively he knew that a gentleman does not speak of his self conquests. All he could say was that he couldn't go. Lady Kezzy tried reasoning, questioning, till, suspecting more than came to the surface, she let him go, and went down to the cottage in the lane.

The widow knew nothing. "The boy had changed his mind," she supposed. "Children were strange things."

Sorely puzzled, loath to believe Jerry changeable, my lady returned. Lady Karen, hearing of it, smiled cynically.

"Another of Keziah's swans who are only ducklings," she said. But in spite of outward appearances, deep down in my lady's heart ran a feeling that things were not all they seemed, and that her swan would some day show himself in his true colours.

CHAPTER XII

THE WITCH LIFTS THE CURTAIN AND LETS JERRY OUT OF THE CAGE

MISTRESS LONELINESS, with her troop of followers, fled the cottage, and Dame Habit, who is a daughter of Time, and from him inherits her comforting character, her healing touch, and soft monotonous voice, took her place. And Jerry, the widow too, almost forgot the old peacefulness, the old homely routine. Fear, dread, and unrest also dwelt in the cottage. Habit, it is true, bore some of their keenest pain, and, as far as it was in her power, made life bearable. But not even she could do more. The minister, like some cruel slave driver, was here, there, and everywhere. Meals must be ready, fires made up, his clothes brushed and mended, and, what Jerry only guessed at, money forthcoming.

Food grew scarcer. Bread—the widow gleaned from the first stroke of church bell till evening fell—eked out by vegetables, and these two, supplemented by odds and ends from fields, formed their chief subsistence. Even then a meal seldom passed without remonstrance from Jerry at the unequal division. In truth the widow's appetite was gone, although, who shall say but that among the dim, unsuspected emotions stirring in the depths of her personality, the virtue of self-denial had not crept in. Habit stroked down the thin frame, smoothed away the old hard look in the wrinkled face, and the widow, doing away with the front as it grew shabby, parted the grey strands, and restored Nature's balance between skin and hair.

The village looked on and pitied, only guessing at half the

happenings in the cottage, but seeing outside what its inmates never suspected.

"Mrs. Hagges is losin' all her good looks," said the farmer's wife, with a sniff which said plainly, "An' I know why." "Marriage ain't done much for her, an' that I could ha' told her. Takin' up wi' that ninimy-pinimy of a man. She ain't much count, but he—"

At which the farmer would shake his head solemnly with a far away, troubled expression.

"I'm afeard there ain't much happiness up there, wife, an' I'm afeard for the child. He's lost the look o' a child."

"He's only got hisself to blame," answered Mrs. Chubbe tartly; "he should ha' taken my lady's offer. There's Betty gone, an' the little count, an' after all his fine talk o' savin' an' makin' hisself a gentleman, what's it all come to? Actions speak louder'n words, say I."

But the farmer saw deeper. He, too, knew Loneliness unmasked; he, too, in solitary tramps and long days amid corn fields and pasture lands, heard Pan's piping, and recognized its different keys, and though unable to put his thoughts into words, instinctively knew whom they called.

"There summat more'n what the child says," he mused to himself, yet content to wait, knowing that, sooner or later, truth will out. Ah, the dull dreary days. The sun never seemed to shine now, skies were always grey. Betty's holidays brought a spark of happiness, but Betty too, was altering. She spoke softly, laughed less, and, when she thought of it, stopped romping. There was much to tell that was interesting.

"Oh, Jerry, the sisters are so kind and so gentle, and yet you've got to do all they say. And it's so peaceful, and the convent garden—oh, I do wish you could see it. It's lovely. And all the young ladies—I'm a young lady now, Jerry; isn't it funny?—are so nice to me, but—" a soft look grew in Betty's eyes, "there's not one like Lady Mary. Oh, Jerry, she's an angel. I envy the girls who go to school when she's a sister.

You know, she's going to take the vows when she's grown up. I'm glad I'm not; I shouldn't like to be a nun; I want to see things, and wear nice clothes, and—and—"

Betty babbled on, but Jerry hardly listened; he was thinking of Lady Mary. Again came the longing to see her.

Paul, too, was heard of. He wrote long letters to both children. Betty's—read of course by those in authority—contained no allusion to that last meeting. Jerry's opened up new fields for thought, or would have done under other circumstances. For the present all desire for outside interests had left him. And when the letters were read, and the holidays over, dreariness fell again.

So the long, long years passed. In spite of—a modern might have said because of—poor living, poor clothing, and lack of comforts, Jerry grew apace, adding inches to his height and pounds to his weight. The sturdy shoulders broadened and deepened; he could run and lift with any man on the farm. No longer did the minister lay a hand on him, that gentleman had other fish to fry nowadays. During the past years his love—if violent passion and an almost uncontrollable jealousy could be called by such a name—for Hester, had grown to something almost terrible in its obsession. The old religious fanaticism dwarfed and paled beside its rival, yet still lingered, mingling confusedly in the half crazy brain with the all-absorbing desire.

He would wander about the fields and woods, talking, gesticulating wildly; the villagers, his own followers at least, were vastly edified. "'Tis minister wrastlin' wi' the devil," said they, and watched secretly and with fearful awe.

The inmates of the cottage saw very little of him. For that reason, or perhaps because of a look in the boy's face, which would have warded off a stronger man, the widow suffered less—at least, there were no signs of any violence. And with Father Time and Dame Habit at the helm, Jerry slipped into his old ways again, working, modelling, learning, even though all hope of anything different was gone. There

was a strange feeling of content, of duty done and self conquered. My Lady Kezzy was dimly conscious of it; Farmer Chubbe knew and understood, and, if possible, Jerry grew dearer every day, almost as dear as Betty.

About this time the farmer, too, began to build; but not a castle, only a small nest, snug and warm, and very near his heart—such a humble future, yet perhaps more beautiful than the grand palaces and cloud-capped towers which younger architects were planning. It is one of Nature's laws that forces gather in the quiet times. Events were drawing together, shaping, and were soon about to burst like stars from a rocket.

It began by a piece of news in the village. Roger Dyke came in for a legacy—"a bag of money" said report, "a hundred pounds" averred gossip. This smoke was not without fire; it soon became known that an old aunt had left a stocking full of sovereigns, sixty in all, and Cloudesley wondered and talked for seven days, then found another topic. Roger Dyke, a thrifty man and somewhat of a miser, put the money aside, meaning to bank it next market day. But the bright gold was alluring, and Thursday after Thursday passed, and the bag still lay hidden under one of the boards in the sitting-room.

There are certain women to whom a man is a man, regardless of his character or appearance. Mrs. Hagges was such. There are others who prefer a warped nature, even if coupled with a repulsive ugliness, who see in him something which the ordinary man does not possess. Such was Hester Dyke. Handsome, bold, unscrupulous, she found in the minister a fascination wholly lacking in her husband, honest man, or indeed, in any one of the bucolic swains, whom, by dint of smiles and jealousy of each other, she kept dangling after her.

The minister, between want of her and want of the widow's worldly belongings, had, like the donkey between two bundles of straw, been hung up. Hester herself settled matters by

her marriage. But afterwards, the old footing had been re-established, and the minister consorted with the husband while he made love to the wife, a love-making whose secrecy had a curious fascination in it for their natures. It might have gone on indefinitely, but for the money and Roger Dyke's love for it.

One morning, Cloudesley had its ears tickled with the choicest piece of scandal for many a long year. The minister had deserted his flock, Hester Dyke was missing, and her husband's bag of money was gone.

It had been well planned. She had left home on a two days' visit to a friend at Channington. The minister was responsible to no one but himself. They were traced to a town some twenty-five miles away, and from thence to London, where, in the whirlpool of the great city, they were swallowed up and forgotten, save by the few.

Roger Dyke, in a sober, phlegmatic way, loved his wife, but she had ruled him, and after the first shock there was a sense of freedom unknown for some years. He loved his money more, and what with anger for its loss, bitter hatred of the man who had led her on to take it, and the aforesaid freedom, Hester was secondary. If she chose to run away from a good home and husband, why, she could go, and he resumed his bachelor ways without much regret.

To the cottage the news came like a bolt from the blue. Peter the Ranger, that inveterate gossip, brought it.

"So you've lost him, missis," he said, standing back to the fire—there was no bread and cheese, and no ale forthcoming in those spare days, "an' you'll not be grievin' I'm thinkin'. He's been a poor sort o' husband, for sartain, out nights an' days, an' never keepin' you company, nor givin' a hand wi' the housework."

The widow, hesitating between the sufficiency of one egg or the extravagance of two, heard but little. Peter shook his head at her denseness.

"I must speak plain," he murmured to himself; then aloud,

"You've lost him, widow," and, struck by the appropriateness of the name, "aye—you're widow indeed—you'll never need scold a body when he calls you that again." She looked up, beating her pudding.

"What are you talking of, Peter?" Peter, to speak metaphorically, beat his breast. "How's a man to tell her?"

"Missis, the minister's gone off, gone off an' left you."

"Gone off—" she repeated vaguely, "yes, I know; but he'll be back soon for his dinner."

"Oh, will he?" responded Peter, with sarcastic emphasis. "I tell you, widow, he's gone, gone with another man's wife, an' you'll not see him again till the money's spent." The widow's cheeks paled.

"Gone—" she echoed. "The money—"

"Yes, yes," was the impatient reply. "Gone. He went off two days ago—he an' that good-looking piece, Roger Dyke's wife; an' between them, they've taken sixty pounds, the legacy old Aunt Jane left; an'—an'—why, hold up, Harriet, what's amiss? I didn't ought to ha' told you so sudden like." The meaning had dawned, and the widow's spoon dropped from her hand. Peter caught her as she tottered to the armchair, and he noticed pityingly how the plump frame had dwindled.

"Could hardly ha' carried her at one time," he muttered, "an' now. There's naught to grieve on, missis," he said, standing over her. "'Tis no loss." She shook her head.

"A husband's a husband, Peter."

"There's some as don't deserve the name. You'd ha' done better with me, Harriet, when we was young."

"Maybe, maybe." The first shock was passing, and she made an effort to get on her feet.

"Sit where ye are, missis. I'll send a neighbour in as I go." A look of terror came into her face.

"No, no, Peter—don't ye do that. He wouldn't like it; he can't abide strangers." Peter lifted his hands in dismay.

"Are ye daft, missis? Don't you understand? He's gone—gone. You can do as you like now."

"Can I?" She sat plucking idly at the red-cushioned arms. Peter watched, despairing of making an impression.

"I'll go an' send Mrs. Chubbe. Women understand these things." The widow took no notice. After a while she glanced mechanically at the clock, then stumbled to her feet and returned to her pudding. But even as she stirred in the flour the whole understanding burst upon her.

"He won't want it—won't want any more puddings." And with a groan she sank back in the chair, her hands covering her face, the tears slowly oozing through as she rocked backward and forward. So Mrs. Chubbe found her, and, looking, forbore to scold. They got her to bed. There, in the rose-papered room, under the patchwork counterpane, box-patterned, which, with the china, had been among the joys of her life, she lay, half waking, half sleeping, between consciousness and dreaming, for some days.

Neighbours crept in and out, kindly, simple souls, with brews and possets of their own making, and offers of assistance. Jerry wandered about the cottage and garden, missing sadly the familiar figure, wondering, surmising, but never letting his thoughts run to the future. Tibbie, after searching kitchen, back'us, and parlour, even to the high shelves where perchance her mistress might lie hid, made an upward journey, and having found what she wanted, took up her position on the bed, where henceforth she lay undisturbed. The doctor, a spare, keen-faced man, with little appearance of sympathy, came from Channington, and pronounced the verdict.

"She'll linger. A fortnight—a month—maybe two, but—" He shook his head, and Mrs. Chubbe, burning with curiosity, put a question. He looked at her, and hesitated for a moment.

"You're a sensible woman, and perhaps you'll believe and perhaps not; but it's true, notwithstanding. There are some people who have so little stamina that a sudden shock will kill them, as it will a mouse. Moreover," he lifted his keen eyes, "in some the shock takes the form of a broken heart. This is an instance." And with an air of "Take it or leave it," the

doctor creaked down the narrow stairs, mounted his horse and rode away, leaving Mrs. Chubbe gasping with astonishment.

"A broken heart—did ever hear the like on't?" she said that evening in conclusion, when retailing the news to her husband. "Doctor must be daft. An' what's she had to break her heart? 'Tisn't grief, for sure, for a worse husband never lived i' this world. But he'll get what he hain't bargained for, if I know Hester Dyke. A woman who's once left a man'll do it again for two pins. She'll ha' none o' his tantrums. Broken heart indeed—T-r-r-r-r." With a sound, expressive, as no words could be, of utmost scorn, Mrs. Chubbe flounced out. The farmer slowly filled his long clay pipe, pressing down the tobacco meditatively, and moved his head from side to side in a ruminating way.

"Wimmen, wimmen," he ejaculated softly, "they're queer kittle-cattle." Then, lighting the pipe and taking a long draw, he blew a pensive cloud of smoke. "Well, well—'tis a queer world too." He settled himself in the chimney corner, moved the pewter spittoon to a handy spot. "An' there be queer folk in it, mostly wimmen." With this summary, the farmer put his pipe between his lips, and succumbed to the soothing influence.

And so another visitor was on his way to the cottage. Day by day his footsteps drew nearer, the shadow of his coming grew longer. It must have touched the widow's bedroom, for she grew restless.

"Send the child," she said. Mrs. Chubbe, bending over her, asked if she meant Jerry. A little nod answered her, and the farmer's wife went downstairs to give the message. Jerry noiselessly crept up the stairs and entered the rose-patterned room. The firelight glowed and flickered, long shadows ran up and down the walls, in and out the furniture, and moved across the bed, even playing over the tired face, familiar, yet unfamiliar with a dim foreshadowing of the great knowledge coming so soon. She opened her eyes as he came near, and beckoned with a thin finger.

"Come here, little boy; nearer—nearer." The voice was low and faltering, but clearly intelligent. She pulled him close and whispered with some of the old frightened air.

"Has he gone? You're sure he's not here, not in the corner, nor behind the bed."

Jerry looked to reassure her, and she went on; yet all the time the tired eyes moved restlessly as though seeking.

"I hain't been a good woman—no, I hain't," slowly the words came. "'Twasn't a pound a month—" the labouring breath drew more heavily. "'Twas—'twas—three. An' at first—at first—I—spent it, I—I—bought—a new—carpet—for—the—bedroom—an'—an'—things—"

Jerry broke in. "Oh, Mrs. Hagges, dear Mrs. Hagges, it doesn't matter." But she waved him aside with a troubled look and he interrupted no more.

"I couldn't abide to be shabby. An'—an', then, somehow when I knowed ye better—I—I—couldn't—" She raised herself, holding with one bony hand on Jerry. Unlike Mrs. Chubbe, who, under similar circumstances would have forbidden conversation or excitement, he made no remonstrance, only propping her with pillows and holding the wasted hand in his. The weak voice rose in triumphant glee.

"But—I've—got it—all on it—an' he—never—got it—though he tried—an' he's—cruel bad." She pulled him closer. "He won't come in—you're sure—sartain sure?"

"No, m'am. He's not here; he's a long way off."

"Well, then." The words came between long gasping breaths. Jerry's tears fell. She was turning, hurriedly, as though seeking something. "The bed post—where is it?" Jerry, wondering, guided her hand; with a sound, which in health could only have been described as a chuckle, she held his finger, drawing it slowly downwards till it touched one of the richly carved roses.

"Press—press—" she whispered. Still wondering, but obedient, he pushed the wood inwards. Something creaked, stirred, and behold, the whole piece of carving moved upwards, dis-

closing a hollow aperture. The widow's fingers fumbled, sank in the hole, and found what they sought—a small bag. Sinking back on the pillows, she waited, grasping the treasure till strength should return, then thrust it into Jerry's hand.

"It's yours, little boy, yours, take it. You're a good little boy—an' that—I've—always said. An'—an'—hide it—he—wants—it. But he shan't—have it—no—he shan't—it's all—yours—little boy—the cottage—an'—an'—" The voice grew weaker—weaker—a flicker lit the tired, worn face, and Jerry, inexperienced as he was, saw another shadow, a shadow which was not one of the merry, playful ones which lived in the room.

"An'—an'—the—chaney—came from afar off." He flew to the door and called; then, with the thoughtfulness of an older head, replaced the bag and closed the spring.

"An'—an'—all—" softly came from the bed; then silence, broken by the creaking of the stairs. Mrs. Chubbe was standing by him, grave, silent for once.

And the shadow lengthened; it seemed to fill the room, driving those others to shelter. Darker, dimmer, grew the twilight, slowly on the stillness Church Clock struck five. Mrs. Chubbe lit candles and pushed the bed curtains further back. The light seemed to rouse the dying woman. Across the tired, worn face came a gentle creasing and uncreasing.

"Get along—wi'—ye—do—" She had gone back to that first evening. Then, suddenly opening her eyes, she moved, half rose, and cried: "Simeon—oh—Simeon!" then fell, gasping.

Mrs. Chubbe, with a muttered cry, put her arms about her and laid her gently down.

"It's over, child," she said, regardless of the tears running down her cheeks; "an' quiet—she never even wanted the goose pillow. An' now, run across an' tell neighbour Brown, she'll come an' help me, an' keep in the kitchen till I tell you."

Within five minutes the two women were shut in the bedroom. Jerry drew the red curtains of the kitchen, made up

the fire and filled the kettle, knowing that when the last services were over, a stimulant in the form of tea would be welcome.

And then, somehow, the intervening years became as naught. In the quiet of the kitchen Mistress Loneliness peeped through the door, and unmasking, was her old self. Forgetful of his long legs, Jerry drew out the three-legged stool, and sitting on it, was a child once more. A little lonely boy, thoughtful, but not, as he knew it now, altogether unhappy. A grey mist gathered in the red-cushioned armchair opposite, formed and took shape, filling it, making dents in the cushions. Tibbie, asleep again on the hearth, purred loudly, the kettle hummed, then broke into singing, and suddenly, from somewhere, came the chirp—chirp of a cricket. In the silence he could almost hear the widow's deep breathing. All around, one after another, the inanimate things woke up. They had been watching, watching, all those years. Now they found their voices, and they were no longer malicious, jeering, nor did they grin as of old in the witch's kitchen.

A witch! Strange thought now, and yet once so natural. Only a poor old woman, ignorant, simple, yet with the germs of nobility, of love. She was gone—gone.

"What then?" cried the inanimate things. "She was here for a space, as we are. She lived her little life as we live ours. Nature gave her the divine spark of life, as we are given it, only a larger share. She is gone, as we shall go; as even you, Jerry boy, with your youth and your strength, and your great thoughts, which are, after all, so puny—with your longings, your aspirations, your cravings for something beyond—will go. Even so shall we all pass, singly, unconsciously, into the great heart of nature. And she, good mother, shall do as she will with us—return us to this world, pass us on to another, or perhaps, if we're very, very tired, she'll let us sleep and rest awhile."

They laid her in a green corner of the churchyard, amid

long grass and ancient stones, beneath the shadow of Church Clock; and the busy tide of life swept up, closed over, and flowed on its way.

Jerry was free. Yet, just at first, like a caged bird regaining its liberty, he hardly knew how to use his freedom. The story of the money had been told to Mr. Chubbe and his wife, who, when necessity arose, could guard a secret like death itself. Together they had drawn the bag from its hiding place and investigated its contents. There was, first of all, a sealed envelope containing the widow's will.

"Dck, dck!" ejaculated Mrs. Chubbe, "to think on it. She must ha' gone into Channington to Lawyer Todd to get it done." But done it was; the widow's mark witnessed, and all in order, bequeathing everything to Jerry. Beneath lay eighty pounds in gold sovereigns, and Mrs. Chubbe could only murmur feebly, "Dck—dck—dck—to think on it."

And Jerry? A host of feelings seemed to rush through him, the chief one surprise at the difference in himself. Five years ago how he would have rejoiced, with what elation would he have started off, armed with a safeguard against poverty. And now—romance had fled; the money was money only. He would go to London, of course, but soberly, ready to take up work as a man takes work. No longer Johnny-head-in-Air, nor the miller's son; just a boy unfolding into a man, realising reality, and prepared to face practical difficulties, the first being an interview with Lady Kezzy. He was independent, he wanted no one's help; but he did want her to know that his resolution was still the same as it had been five years ago, and, without in the least exposing his self-denial—which, looking back, he knew had only been a step for his own good—make her understand. There was no need. My lady, after congratulating him, came to the point.

"Jerry, why didn't you accept my offer years ago?" The colour mounted beneath his brown skin. He made no answer.

"Did you stay because you thought it was your duty?" He raised his truthful brown eyes to hers.

"My lady, would you mind if I didn't answer that? You see, I've never altered, and indeed, indeed, 'twasn't because I didn't want to."

And my lady understood. She turned the conversation into a practical channel.

"Do you still wish to enter a studio, Jerry?"

"Yes, my lady. I was going to ask you if you would tell me of one." For a moment she looked thoughtful.

"The best thing," she said presently, "will be to write a letter of introduction to my old drawing master, Signor Ardigny. He has a studio and will no doubt assist you on my recommendation, and your own merits," she added smilingly. "I'll give you the letter now."

She rose, and going to a side table, drew ink and paper towards her, writing busily. A silence fell in the lamplit room, only broken by the dropping of embers, and the scratch of my lady's quill. Suddenly he was conscious of a curious feeling; his heart beat, something surged in his head, and a thrill ran through him, like the sudden contact of ice water. It was so quick, that he hardly realised that it preceded a sound —the sound of a fresh girlish voice, clear, and coming nearer.

"Aunt Kezzy, Aunt Kezzy, where are you?"

Again the clutch at his heart. He half rose, the handle turned, and the door opened. Jerry stood up, a mist before him, his heart beating till the room seemed full of sound, and he knew romance had come back, that it was never dead.

Framed in the dark oak of the door stood a fairy—white, white was her dress of finest muslin, whiter still the soft neck and arms peeping from its snowy folds. Blue, blue, her eyes as summer cornflowers, golden the long curls which fell around her—pale gold as the cornfields beneath azure skies—and the sound of her voice was like the rippling of brooks over pebbly stones on a hot summer day.

"Aunt Kezzy, Aunt Karen says—" she broke off, seeing Jerry. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know you were engaged."

She drew back, the door closed, and all the glory of the world was gone. Yet deep in Jerry's heart, flung in that moment, lay a seed, and it fell on soil made ready for it. In the days to come it was to germinate and bud, but the blossom lay hid in the future.

My lady finished her letter, and handed it to him with many injunctions. So the first step was taken. It was Mr. Chubbe who made the second, promising to take charge of the main sum, and bidding him see Messrs. Gardiner and Gardiner at the earliest opportunity. To Mrs. Chubbe fell the third.

"You must get yourself gentleman's clothes, child, directly you get there," she said. "Spend some of your money if needs be, it'll pay you i' the end. An' if pedlar can't give you lodgin', put up at a respectable inn till you hear of something. Her busy fingers patched, mended, darned, and packed his carpet bag. The farmer went to Channington next market day, and brought back strange contributions—brilliant handkerchiefs and cravats; finally producing, with many winks and chuckles, a gold fob chain fashioned like a ribbon, soft and pliable and finished with an onyx seal.

"It'll do to wear wi' your gentleman's clothes, laddie," he said, presenting it, "for 'twas bought from a gentleman, an' I'll tell you how I come by it. Mrs. Plumtre was asking me about ye—you was always a favourite, you know, laddie—an' by-'n-by she slipped off upstairs an' fetched this. Says she, 'You take it to him, farmer—'twas my boy's once; he bought it of a gentleman who'd come down i' the world, an' if Jerry brings him back, he shall ha' another 'stead o' this. An' if he doesn't—well—I'd rather he than any one else, for he's a good youth, an' if he can, he'll find my boy. So gi' him my blessin', farmer, an' tell him I know he'll do his best.' So 'tis yours, laddie, in trust for that there ne'er-do-well."

Jerry's heart was full; but for being seventeen, the tears might have fallen. He kept them back and took the gift and the trust.

So, in the dark November morning he said good-bye to

Cloudesley, and mounting the little cart behind Jenny, drove with the farmer and Betty—who had arrived unexpectedly a day or two before, having been sent home with the other young ladies to avoid an epidemic of measles, which had broken out at the convent—into Channington to meet the early coach.

It brought back memories. Margery, never heard of again; daddy, only coming in dreams; the witch, gone, never to return; and a little boy, who had lived nine years with Loneliness, and grown to love her so dearly that the parting with her was almost as sharp as the parting with the farmer.

The stable yard was unchanged; just the same bustle and commotion, the same people, it seemed to him, Daniel slightly older, the same voices, laughter, tears, the same long tally-ho of the horn, the same rattle over the cobbles, the same swing into the high road, the same waving of handkerchiefs, only this time he was not among those who waved. He saw the farmer's red face as they turned, Betty's sparkling one, Mrs. Plumtre's little round figure, and heard her shrill good-byes, and then, hey! for the long, long road, and London City, and all the mystical future.

Part Two: London

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CHAPTER I

THE SWINEHERD SEEKS HIS FORTUNE

IT was past six o'clock when the coach neared London. The road ran by the little hamlets of Seven Kings and Romford, across Chadwell Heath, through the forest, and by the marshes and low lying land which stretched for miles along the valley of the Lea. Through the villages of Poplar, Bow, and Hackney, and the lights of London glimmered ahead. Vast, shadowy places outlined themselves against the dark sky, faintly tinged with reflected light. Dim steeples and domes rose like dream castles, the hum of London reached him, like the hum of a swarming hive, and passengers stirred, seeking wraps and luggage.

The bells of Shoreditch were ringing sweetly as they clattered through the village, and in a few minutes had reached the eastern side of the city. Through Bishopsgate, up London Wall, along Cheapside, skirting London's great shadowy church, down Ludgate Hill, into the Strand, and with a cry and a "tally ho!" they clattered into a courtyard as St. Clement's struck eight.

"Well timed, gentlemen," cried Daniel, pushing aside the heavy leather, and with slow ponderous steps climbing down the ladder. "An' that brings my record ahead for the year," he added, burying his face in a foaming tankard tendered by an ostler, who watched admiringly as the pewter tilted higher and higher, and Daniel, draining the last drop, handed it back with a satisfied smack.

Jerry stood for a few moments; the new surroundings were vastly interesting, and he was loath to leave the familiar faces of Daniel and his fellow passengers till obliged. One by one they melted away. Daniel shook hands and disappeared. Gathering up his courage, Jerry lifted his bag, consulted the scrap of paper containing the pedlar's address, and walked out of the courtyard.

He stood awhile, wondering if any great matter was in hand, for people flocked down the ill-paved street, lit dimly by lanterns, all intent, seemingly, on business or pleasure. But Jerry, though country bred, was no fool. After waiting some few minutes, it dawned upon him that this was London's usual state. He laughed a little at his own stupidity, and crossing the road, started in earnest for his destination.

Out of the main thoroughfare the streets were narrow, dark and dirty. A few straggling loiterers directed him occasionally, and now and then a carriage, with powdered footmen and gorgeous coachmen, not unlike my Lord Cloudesley's own, passed, conveying some great folk to Drury Lane or the Opera House in Covent Garden. Several times he would have stayed to gaze open-mouthed at the marvels around him, but one of Mrs. Chubbe's many admonitions came to his mind, "Don't be surprised at aught, child; keep your thoughts to yourself, an' don't be 'Hail fellow, well met' with every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

He had complete reliance on Mrs. Chubbe—had she not lived with the great ones of the earth? Besides, the advice, to his mind, carried its own merits. In and out, twisting, turning, asking, at last he came to where several streets met, forming a kind of square, tolerably wide. A street lamp stood in the midst, and its rays fell on what had no doubt been at some time a nobleman's house. Three-sided it stood, enclosing a small piece of ground, round which ran a paved path. The middle section had long windows, gleaming darkly in the lamplight; but those in the side wings were closely boarded up. In the centre of the right building, facing the square,

was a heavy door, studded with nails and bearing as knocker a man's hand grasping an iron stancheon—probably some heraldic device connected with the house's former occupants. Over this ancient memento ran a curiously modern inscription, "Reuben Gade—Dealer in Antiquities."

Now the final venture had come, Jerry advanced somewhat timidly, and lifting the massive knocker, gave a gentle rap. He waited, then repeated the knock. A voice from within, unmistakably the pedlar's, cried, "Toby, Toby Dingle, where are you?" followed, after a short interval, by the sound of footsteps, not slow like the widow's, but with the slowness of feet unwilling to be brisk. They came nearer, the catch was turned, the door opened a few inches, and a voice spoke.

"Who is it? What do you want?"

"Is Mr. Gade in? Will you please tell him that it's Jerry, Jerry Dell, from Cloudesley?"

"From Cloudesley," the voice was full of something undefinable, "Cloudesley," it repeated monotonously, and was silent. Presently it spoke again. "W—who—are you?" Jerry was beginning to grow impatient.

"Mr. Gade knows me; oh, please tell him I've come."

This time the answer was an eye, which peeped cautiously round the edge and took a survey evidently satisfactory, for the door was opened, disclosing the figure of a man wrapped in a loose dressing-gown. He was short and round. Indeed, roundness was the one descriptive adjective summing him up. A round chubby face, singularly childlike—round blue eyes, round cheeks pink tinted, and a round head covered with fair, almost lint white hair—a prepossessing face, a face which, somehow, had the power to evoke cheerful mirth and lightheartedness, and Jerry wondered at the mystery of its appearance.

"Come in, I'll tell Mr. Gade." But at that moment the pedlar emerged from the lighted distance and advanced into the shadow.

"What is it, Toby?" Jerry stepped in.

"It's I, Mr. Gade; Jerry Dell, from the cottage at Cloudesley. You told me to come." Reuben Gade threw up his hands and came quickly forward.

"The little boy! And so you haf kom to London. Said I not so. Kom in, kom in." He caught Jerry's hand, drawing him along the wide entrance. Toby closed the great door and followed, his loose slippers flopping at every step. The Jew was also in deshabille, and as they turned the corner Jerry caught his breath.

There were spaces on either side, dimly dark, stretching into deep shadows. Shapeless outlines of massive furniture loomed mysteriously, soft carpets were under his feet, and there was a curious scent, subtle, indefinite, suggestive of the East, yet also of gardens, warm, perfumed rooms, and vaguely of the sweet scent used by the ladies of Cloudesley Hall.

They reached the end of the wing, and turning to the right, came into the main hall of the house. Here, between the long windows, was a great fireplace of dark oak, matching the rest of the woodwork. It rose high to a narrow mantelshelf, above which was heavy carving and an escutcheon, once emblazoned with coat of arms and crest. In front of this was drawn a small table laid for a meal. Two high-backed chairs stood at the sides, and the whole scene was lit with candelabra and side sconces. To Jerry, tired, cold, hungry, it seemed redolent of comfort and kindliness.

"And now," said the pedlar, "we will haf supper, and be warm and cheerful. Another chair, Toby. Kom, sit and eat, and you shall tell me all about it."

He bustled round as he spoke, laying another place, then drawing the chair fetched by Toby to the fire, thrust Jerry into it, refusing to hear a word. Presently Toby appeared from some distant region bearing a tray of smoking dishes, and a pleasant odour of roast meat and vegetables mingled with the more romantic one before mentioned.

"But, Mr. Gade—" Jerry's remonstrance was cut short.

"Not yet, not yet; when you haf eaten." The warmth and good food, supplemented with a tankard of foaming brown ale, was luxury indeed; Jerry hardly knew himself. The pedlar refused to hear any words, and his guests had time to look round and take in his new surroundings.

The hall was domed, its ceiling lost in misty shadow. From either end sprang a wide, low staircase, with broad balustrade and richly carved banisters. They met on a wide gallery, running the length of the hall, in the centre of which rose a great arch leading to another spacious hall surrounded with doors. In the hall below was a similar arch, also more spaces and doors innumerable. High up, in a corner of the wing he had first entered, was a smaller gallery, which, he afterwards learned, was for minstrels. Doubtless, many a stately minuet, many a grave sarabande or sprightly gavotte, had been danced on the polished floor beneath.

The first course was followed by a dish of wonderful pastries, which the pedlar attacked with vigour.

"I haf a sweet tooth," he said apologetically. "That is my French mothaire."

After the pastries came a strange preparation of cheese. Jerry, remembering Mrs. Chubbe, tasted everything, and as far as possible under such marvellous circumstances, showed no surprise. When at last it was over, his host gave a satisfied sigh, turned his chair to the fire and beckoned Jerry to do the same. Toby cleared the table, placed glasses and strange bottles, and departed.

"Be quick, Toby," said the pedlar, nodding kindly. He took a huge cigar from a box, lighted it, poured out a glass of some pale liquid, and settled to enjoyment. "Now—tell me all about it."

Jerry began, from the widow's death onwards, and the Jew listened with interest.

"Poor thing—poor thing," he said, when it was finished; "she would not see me for two—three—years."

"I think," said Jerry, "she was afraid; and then, you see, we had no money."

"Ah, no—ah, no." Reuben smoked on, then flicked the ash into the fire, a sterner look on his kindly features. "He was a bad man, and she lost nothing when he went. But there—" a shrug of the great shoulders, "she could not see it. Ah—these poor, foolish women. And yet, we would not haf them else. Poor thing—poor thing." Again there was silence; Toby's voice carolled in the distance.

> Begone, Dull Care; I prithee bego-one from me,
> Begone, Dull Care; too long hast thou tarried with me.

And Toby himself presently appeared, his round cheerful face reminding Jerry curiously of those friendly faces which, so long ago it seemed, used to peep at him over silvery fields and dark woods. A place was made, and thinking the time was come, he broached the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Mr. Gade, would you mind, I mean, could you tell me where I could get a room. Mrs. Chubbe thought you would know. If—if—" Jerry hesitated, "if it could be near here; you see, I know no one in London—only you—and—" The Jew put out a great, hairy paw, and laid it gently on his shoulder.

"I know, I know. I was lonely once—in this great London. It is to some a cruel monster, and to others a kind friend; but it is always fickle—like a woman." He caught Toby's eye. A glance passed between them. "Why not—why not?" he murmured, lapsing into silence. But it was not unbroken. Toby's behaviour, indeed, all that followed, was even stranger than that which had gone before. Every now and then a low chuckle reached Jerry's ears. The Jew frowned meditatively, smoked violently, and gazed into the fire. Jerry fidgetted, time was getting on. He was screwing up his courage to speak, when his host roused.

"This room, I know one. It is near—very near, and cheap;

oh, yes, it is cheap." Toby chuckled loudly; the Jew glared at him.

"It is—" He paused. "What will you pay for board and lodging?"

Jerry hesitated. Three pounds a month, and the widow had saved. That would leave him fourteen pounds a year without touching the bag of savings. Very timidly he suggested it. The Jew threw up his hands, and Toby, quiet now, listened with twinkling eyes.

"Ach! it is too much. They are not robbers—they are my great friends. We will say—"

Here Toby distinguished himself by rolling over, hiding his face in the arm of the chair and shaking with uncontrolled merriment. The Jew watched for a moment, then rose, and punched the offender furiously. Toby took not the slightest notice, and presently the laughter subsided into weak chuckles. He sat straight, wiped his eyes, and looked at the other.

"You know you will—you know you will," he gasped, and Reuben, with a parting punch, turned, and leaping on a small, square stool, reached to the high mantelshelf.

"Well, then, Toby Dingle, you shall not tell lies; I will."

He took down two bottles. One was filled with large golden beads, the other contained only a few. From the former he took one, and solemnly dropping it into the latter, replaced the bottle; then went back to his chair. Jerry watched, completely mystified.

"And now," said the Jew, "we will continue. My friend he wants five shillings a week; that will not hurt you, and it will pay him well. He will sometimes want you to walk with him and talk with him, but not moch—oh, not moch. Will that suit you?"

"Oh!" Jerry's face was puzzled. The sum seemed ridiculous. He thought of the widow, but commonsense told him that London was more expensive.

"It seems too little, Mr. Gade," he said at length.

"Ah, no, ah, no—" The Jew waved his hand airily. "It will pay him well." And Toby chuckled again.

"Of course," Jerry began, "I should be very much obliged."

"Then we will consider it settled," put in his host, with decision, "and Toby shall take you when you are ready. And in the morning you must see these lawyers—Gardiner and Gardiner, I think you said." Jerry rose and held out his hand.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Gade; I will do all you tell me; and I'll come in first and see you, if you don't mind."

"Kom whenever you like," returned Reuben cordially. "No, no, we will not say good-bye, like you English say. We will shake hands and say, 'Gott be with you.'"

The kindly face was gravely serious; Jerry's hand was gripped and shaken heartily. Toby, taking a silver candlestick, led the way. When they reached the turn of the great hall, instead of making for the entrance, he turned towards the staircase. Wondering, but thinking that doubtless another door brought them nearer, Jerry followed. Up the easy steps, under the arch to the left, they went through corridors whose doors led heaven knew where, and everywhere was furniture, some covered with white cloths, gleaming ghost-like in the dim light, some only showing dark outlines. Toby waved towards some of the doors.

"All the best's in there," he said; "the finest pictures and carvings and sculpture."

"It's a wonderful place," said Jerry.

"Yes—and Reuben's a wonderful man." They had come to a sharp turn; from what he could gather they were over the boarded wing. Toby stopped, and taking a huge bunch of keys from some hiding place in the dressing-gown, inserted one, and flung open a door.

"There you are," he cried, his eyes twinkling and his round face beaming.

"But," said Jerry bewildered, "I don't understand. Mr. Gade said a friend."

"Yes, yes," cried Toby gleefully, "don't you see? He's

the friend. He likes you, and he spoke of you, and I knew, from when you first came, that he meant this."

"Oh, but I can't." Jerry glanced round the room; he wondered if anything at Cloudesley could be finer. "I couldn't take so much from him. You see, I'm a stranger; I couldn't—"

"You must." Toby's face and tone were serious. "Reuben would be very hurt, indeed, very angry, if you refused. He's one of the best men in the world, but if anyone offends him, he'll not forgive them easily; and, you take my word for it, if you say anything to him about not staying, he'll let you go, but you'll never be his friend again."

Jerry thought. Fortunately for his pride, he had very little idea of the cost of living. Five shillings a week did not seem much, especially to so rich a man. On the other hand there was the empty bedroom; perhaps, after all, it might go further than he thought. But conscience whispered that the offer was generous, and something deeper still showed him the pedlar's kindly heart, and he understood how easy it is to wound a thing so soft and gentle.

"It's very, very kind of Mr. Gade, and of you too. I should like to go straight back and thank him, if you think he wouldn't mind."

"Wait till the morning," advised Toby; "he's got his treasures now, and won't want to be disturbed."

"Treasures?" echoed Jerry.

"Yes." Toby chuckled again. "He sits up half the night reading old books and manuscripts and going through his collections. He loves them like children. I've often seen him send away a good customer because he couldn't bring himself to part with something or other he wanted. Oh, Reuben's a queer fish, I tell you." Jerry made a plunge.

"Are you—I mean, do you live here?" Toby nodded.

"Oh, yes, I live here. He couldn't do without me. I know where everything is, and can manage that business," he jerked a thumb towards the boarded wing, "as well as he can, better

p'raps," he added with a wink. "I'm not so soft." Which statement Jerry questioned. "Sometimes," Toby was wound up, "he'll pack his traps and go off hawking wares for weeks together. Says he's fought London long enough and wants to be alone in the country. So off he goes, and I expect him when I see him; he knows it's all right. The house has strong bars and iron shutters. No chance for thieves." Jerry forgot his fatigue in listening. Toby suddenly remembered.

"I say, though, I'm talking and keeping you up." He lit a tall candle from his own. "You'll find your bed's aired all right. I saw to that when you first came; I knew what would happen," with another chuckle. "Good-night. Hope you'll sleep well. I'll call you in the morning."

He held out his hand, and to both came that instinct which precedes friendship. Jerry watched him go down the corridor; his song reached him, receding in the distance. "Begone, Dull Care—I prithee, begone from me." Closing the door, he took a survey of his new surroundings, beginning at the big bow window. It jutted out, half across a narrow road. A street lamp, at its last gasp for want of oil, flickered, but showed very little. Jerry had an idea that the street was squalid and poor. Not so his room. Softly carpeted, hung with rich curtains and furnished handsomely, it was quite fit, its inmate thought, for even the earl. How came he to be in such luxury? Jerry shook his head thoughtfully as he undressed, and climbed into the high, darkly hung bed, soft as a box mattress and down bed could make it. Before the lamp gave its last flicker he was asleep.

Used to country hours, he lay awake some time waiting for Toby's knock. In the twilight of a November morning his surroundings seemed more wonderful than ever. A great swinging pier glass in one corner caught a gleam of light from somewhere, making a steely glimmer in the blackness. As dawn came, things grew vague, then shadowy, and finally settled down to their day-time shapes. In them, too, Jerry saw life, but it was the life of old things, a retrospective, thought-

ful musing. They were not interested in him, nor in anything round; theirs were remembrances of old castles and palaces, of noble knights and gentle ladies, of terrors, of hideous things which belonged to darker ages, of romance and love, of moonlight meetings, of runaway matches. Ah! if they could only tell him stories.

He pushed open the casement window; the street was, as he had thought, narrow, squalid, with a few poor houses opposite. Looking alongside, he could see that what few windows there were were also boarded up. In the centre of the wing a door opened to the street, and over it hung three massive gilt balls. He wondered what they meant, and came to the conclusion that they had something in common with the knocker on the front entrance.

Toby's cheery voice called him from the window. He dressed hastily, realising that London air had a curious rawness, untempered by the soft mists and damp, decaying scents of the country. A wet fog hung round, filling the room; from outside came footsteps, the voices of passers-by, muffled, distant, yet distinct. The narrow street was full of echoes, and from far away came a sound as of a giant rousing. It was London awaking for the day, humming her song of shops and trade, of greatness and wealth, and Jerry, hearing it, grew drunk with its intoxicating witchery. Romance was there, romance of life, of youth, of strength, of power to conquer. It ran through his veins, thrilling, calling, drawing him to London's great heart. For like a syren, her song goes on for ever, and for ever men will hear her voice, calling—calling—bringing desire and longing, and only those who are deaf to its beauty can see the dark depths beneath, can hear the undercurrent, which tells of misery, cruelty, hate, and coarse surroundings.

At eighteen one's blood is liquid fire, and Jerry, filled with excitement, found his way down to the great hall. Though lacking a woman's touch, it was spick and span, even as Mrs. Chubbe's kitchen, glittering with beeswax, soap, and elbow

grease. Toby's work, no doubt, and Jerry registered a vow to assist him from henceforth.

A blazing fire roared up the chimney, white damask and sparkling silver adorned the table. High above hung a dim, nebulous vapour, giving the domed hall a strange loftiness. Through the window grey daylight struggled in, trying in vain to extinguish the cheery gleam of candles on the table. Toby opened a window, the roar of London grew louder, and a great gust of fog burst in triumphantly.

Oh, the wonder of it all. Even the pedlar, busy brewing something which gave out a strong, fragrant aroma—Jerry afterwards knew it for coffee—appeared as some friendly genie, while Toby only needed a turban to become at once his slave, bearing silver dishes heaped with precious stones and gold. Jerry was meeting romance face to face.

His first act after shaking hands was to tender thanks for the kindly offer. Reuben accepted them with as much gratitude in his soft eyes as in Jerry's brown ones; then waved them aside and began planning for the day.

"You shall see these lawyers—that is first. Then, to the studio. Toby shall take you to Messrs. Gardiner, and after you shall go alone. It is goot to be alone when one does business; one does not want others."

Conversation soared high, into unknown regions of politics and art, while Jerry sat humbly by, longing to take his part in this world of men and men's thoughts. He dressed himself in his best, knowing already that they were the clothes of a countryman, and determined to pay an early visit to the nearest shops.

With the opening of the door came the sense of being part of the roar of London; even their voices helped it. They turned through winding streets. Now and then a milkmaid, taking her empty pails to the farmhouses round Bloomsbury, passed them. Street hawkers, crying "artichokes" or "hot pies," took their way citywards; business men, riding in from

the suburbs of Holloway and Pentonville, dismounted and threw their reins to waiting ostlers, with straw swathed legs and corresponding straws in their mouths. Urchins threw cartwheels on the chance of odd pennies or jobs, and a few orange girls nodded to them as they went by. Everything in the murky gloom was hazy and indistinct, even the yellow lamplights burned mysteriously.

Across the Strand, into the heart of the roar, then out of it, to a world of sodden grassy paths, leafless trees and ancient walls. Here the fog hung thick and low, the roar became a distant humming, a witch's song, a syren's call. Strange figures appeared suddenly through the enveloping veil, black robed, grey wigged, and carrying important looking rolls, then vanished into nothingness; outlines of great buildings loomed upon them, receding again as they went. Toby never faltered; how he knew his way was, of all the marvellous things, most marvellous. Presently he turned up a narrow, paved court and stopped.

"Here you are," he said. "Reuben told me to leave you, but you'll find me somewhere hereabouts when you've done. You'd never find your way in this fog. Sure you're all right?" he added anxiously, and Jerry, suppressing horrible qualms, answered sturdily:

"Quite all right. And Toby, don't wait. I can find my way to the studio, and they may keep me a long while here." Toby nodded approval.

"All right. Then I'll go." He gave him new directions, then vanished down the court. Jerry gathered his courage together and lifted the heavy knocker. It fell with a thud, which seemed to wake every echo of London. They clustered round him, mingling with the quick beating of his heart, and the distant call, mocking, taunting. "You, Jerry Dell—" they cried, "you—country boy—clodhopper—who wants to be a gentleman—ha—ha—"

In the midst of the din the door was thrown back by a

deferential page; Jerry turned, and all the deference was gone. Grinning insolently, he stuck his tongue into his cheek and did a few steps of a warlike dance on the mat.

"Vell, young Hodge, an' oo may you be a-vanting of?"

"My name's not Hodge," said Jerry, "it's Dell." The imp in buttons rocked with suppressed laughter.

"Oh, ain't it, though—then it oughter be. P'raps you're Mister Dell—oh, my!" Another silent convulsion, and Jerry, conscious of his appearance, reddened angrily.

"I want to see Messrs. Gardiner and Gardiner." The imp became a page boy, but a page boy with a wicked grin.

"Yes, sir, shall I take yer card, sir?"

"I haven't got a card." Once more Jerry became profoundly aware of his defects. The goblin page turned, and was once more convulsed with inward merriment.

"'E ain't got a card—a card—oh, my poor sides—they'll split if 'e stays. 'Ow'd yer leave the country, young Hodge? 'Spect yer makin' a mistake, an' it's the 'ousekeeper yer vants. Round the corner, 'ousekeeper's rooms—ta-ta."

The door banged to and wrath rose in Jerry. Forgetful of his clothes, himself, everything but his errand, he knocked again—furiously this time. The door opened a chink, and the imp's head appeared, with an expression of mock terror on it.

"Ho—at it agin, young Hodge. An' vot—" With a quick stride Jerry pushed open the door, seized the urchin by the collar, and gave him a shake. The sham expression turned to a real one.

"Now, look here, master pageboy," he lifted him as he would lift a little worrying dog, shaking him gently, "I don't like jokes. Go and tell your master that Mr. Dell would be glad to see him if he can spare time." The urchin, released, grinned again.

"Yer ain't as green as yer look, young Hodge." Jerry made a stride, and he vanished up the staircase, presently returning by way of the broad balustrading, and beckoned a grubby fin-

ger. Jerry followed, and with a mocking bow of respect, he flung open the door and announced loudly, "Mr. Dell."

An elderly man, tall and thin, wearing long mutton-chop whiskers and a preoccupied air of weariness, rose and bowed. Jerry returned the bow.

"Be seated, Mr. Dell, I pray," said the bewhiskered one, pulling a chair forward and dropping back again into his own, as though overcome with the exertion. For a few minutes he sat silently fondling the whiskers and gazing abstractedly into mid air. Jerry waited, then opened the ball.

"I believe, sir, you knew my father many years ago—Jeremy Dell."

"Ha—" the lawyer roused slightly, "Jeremy Dell, to be sure, to be sure." Jerry continued.

"I am his son. You have been sending money regularly, I believe, to Mrs. Hagges for me?"

"Ha—yes. To be sure, to be sure. So you're Jerry Dell's son." The abstracted glance became more human.

"Yes, sir. And you see, Mrs. Hagges is dead, so will you let me have the money instead? It's three pounds a month, I think."

The lawyer showed no signs of absent-mindedness now, he was alert.

"Three pounds a month. Ha! I suppose you know there is considerably more than that?" Jerry opened his eyes. "Your father left a thousand pounds with us—from the interest, which is good, we have been in the habit of sending, as you say, three pounds a month; but the rest has accumulated; it is about sixty-five pounds a year at present." Jerry's eyes shone. There would be no difficulty about paying Reuben more now.

"But," the lawyer continued, "you must, of course, prove your identity."

"I think there will be no difficulty about that, sir; you see, Mrs. Hagges has left me a large sum of money." The lawyer stared.

"Ha, you're a fortunate young man."

"And if you will, sir," continued Jerry, "I should be glad if you would take charge of it, and let me have the interest on it to use. Then there's the cottage." He dived into the carpet bag and produced rolls of paper and the heavy bag. The lawyer drew his chair in closer and beckoned his client to do the same.

"A cottage too? Ha, it sounds interesting; almost, I might say, romantic." For an hour or more they were buried in business. Jerry, emerging, felt as though he had learned a lifetime's knowledge. At the end of the time the lawyer pushed his chair from the table, and crossing his legs, lay back.

"I am glad, Mr. Dell, to have met you," he said; "also, that although our guardianship is ended, you are still willing to trust us with your affairs. At present, it seems," he smiled frostily, "that you are in no need of money, but London's a large city, an expensive one, and young men are young men. There is a clause in the will which, perhaps you do not know, provides that the pieces of sculpture executed by your father in his lifetime, can be sold if necessary, with one exception, that is—" Jerry started up.

"The casts, sir, do you say? My father's work? Oh, where are they? Let me have them—not to sell, of course." Mr. Gardiner silenced him with an uplifted hand.

"Not so fast, Mr. Dell; I fear I have not made myself understood. The pieces are not in our hands. Your father thought fit," here the tone grew icy, "to entrust them to a fellow artist, a man called Gallagher, a worthless, good-for-nothing rascal. Some years ago, the fellow was hard up; in fact, I may say, penniless, and probably the temptation proved too great; he raised money on the works left in trust, no doubt meaning to redeem them at some future time, which time never came," he added drily. Jerry looked bewildered.

"Do you mean, sir, that my father's work is lost, sold?" The lawyer coughed.

"Well, hardly perhaps what you might call sold. In Lon-

don we have an institution commonly called 'the poor man's bank,' to speak plainly, a pawnshop."

"I see," replied Jerry gravely; "you mean that if the pawnbroker has not sold them I can buy them back?"

"Exactly," replied the lawyer, still more drily; "though whether you can do so depends upon certain conditions. The pawn tickets not being forthcoming—they were probably burnt with the rubbish—you are at the mercy of the pawnbroker. Moreover, which again you may not know, your father's work has, since his death, acquired value. It is possible that even your total wealth may not be sufficient. The statue of Pan alone, I understood, was valued at five hundred pounds, some years since." Pan! How the name conjured up scenes of childhood. For a minute Jerry sat quiet, filled with memories. Then commonsense returned.

"Can you tell me how to find the pawnbroker who bought them?" he asked. The lawyer drew a massive parchment-bound volume towards him.

"It so happens, Mr. Dell, that I can tell you myself. I was interested in your father. He struck me as, well, as a man with a romantic past. Not that I know anything of his life," he added hastily, "oh, dear me, no, but—" he stole a glance from under drooping lids at Jerry, "you may find it an advantage, young man, to investigate your father's history. Well, as I said, I was interested; more especially as, in spite of all we could urge, he refused to leave the things with us. We kept an eye on them, and though powerless to prevent the sale —they were left unconditionally with Gallagher—we traced them to a well known establishment. It is owned by a wealthy man, one Reuben Gade, a—"

"Reuben Gade!" Jerry started to his feet. "Why—I live there." The lawyer lifted his hands in amazement.

"Romance, romance—" he murmured. "Ha, our wonderful lives. Mr. Dell," he turned solemnly to Jerry, "I advise you to go straight back to Reuben Gade; lose no time, and inquire of him as to the history of those works of art."

"I will, indeed," replied Jerry fervently, "and Reuben will treat me fairly, I know. Good-bye, sir, and thank you very much for your kindness."

The lawyer rose and shook hands amicably, if somewhat flabbily; then, touching a bell, he opened a door, saw his visitor out, and returned to his musings.

Toby was waiting at the end of the court; after all, he had not found the courage to leave his friend. But studios were out of the question; with a hasty explanation, they turned homewards. The curtain of fog was lifting—lifting, and behind it a clear November sun was shining. They had come from the further end of the court, and as Jerry raised his eyes, something gleamed between the trees. A ribbon of light it seemed, and he knew it for London's great river. For a moment all else was forgotten; silently he touched Toby's arm and drew him nearer, till the gardens merged into mud-banks and landing stages, and the broad murky river, flecked with dull gold where the chill wintry sun caught it, rolled by in solemn splendour. Yet, it too had a mocking note.

Jerry could have watched all day, magic was round him; but for Toby the river was an everyday thing, and at last he reminded his companion of the time. It was noon as they reached the Strand, and crossed the human tide making its way towards eating-houses and inns, with no thought save only of its stomach. Fragrant scents came on the keen air, of steaks grilling, of onions frizzling, of sausages gently bubbling, and huge sirloins turning and twisting before mighty fires, and Jerry, too, had to descend from Olympian heights and confess to a healthy growing lad's hunger.

Although Toby seemed to know all the business of the place, some instinct of refinement told Jerry that the discussion of such strictly private affairs should be confined to those who were already cognisant of them. He had to control his impatience till after supper, for the Jew was busy with a wealthy customer in the afternoon. It was not, therefore, until Toby

had carried away the empty dishes and Reuben's big cigar was lit that the opportunity came.

"Well," there was a twinkle in the kindly eye which showed that Jerry's impatience had not passed unnoticed, "and how went the business?" He listened with smiling interest as Jerry poured out the amazing tale; but the smile grew less, a look of gravity took its place; it was accompanied by a sterner expression. Presently he thrust back his chair and stood up.

"They were not his to sell." Throwing the unfinished cigar into the fire, he paced angrily up and down, as though to control himself, finally bringing up by Jerry's chair and laying a big soft hand on his shoulder.

"I knew it not, mein yongling." There was a wistful touch in the voice. "He told me they were left to him—that he was penniless—ach!—such a tale. And I, like a fool, believed him."

"But it doesn't really matter what he was," cried Jerry, turning and jumping up. "The things, they are all that matters, and you'll let me buy them back, Mr. Gade, won't you? Oh, I know you will," he added, for there was something in the kind dark face, the gentle eyes, which raised a momentary doubt in his mind. "I'll pay anything, all I've got, and I'll work, oh, I'll work; for you know they're worth more than anything in the world to me, since I've known they're in existence." He paused, waiting for the answer. It was some time before it came, and the doubt grew to a fear. Slowly the Jew turned away.

"They are not here; they are gone."

"Gone!" echoed Jerry sharply. "Gone!" Then, as the dealer's rights dawned, reason told him that no shadow of injustice could rest upon him. Not so did Reuben regard it. There was such a look of trouble in his face that Jerry's heart went out to him.

"Don't worry, Mr. Gade," he said, "perhaps you can tell me who bought them." The Jew shook his head sadly.

"I know not," he said; then, half turning, he beckoned. "Kom, I will tell you. Two heads are better than one, especially when that one is old and silly," he added, smiling, "and we will put them together."

He lighted another cigar, and sat back in the great armchair. Toby entering, was dismissed with a silent wave of the hand. Jerry leaned against the dark wood mantelpiece and listened.

"It was last summer. One hot morning a gentleman came in. He was a great nobleman."

"How did you know? Did he tell you his name?" interrupted Jerry, eagerly.

"No," the Jew shook his head, "it was written in his face, and I see many in my life. Well, he asked, had I any sculpture—clay, stone, bronze, anything. It was a strange request, but I took him upstairs and showed him all I had, which was not much, except that for which you ask. He was long, and I watch, and make my little romance. He was old, and sad, there was trouble in his face and loneliness. Ach, my friend, I say to myself, you haf loved, you haf lost, but death has not taken all, there is hope in your eyes. And, even as I watched, it sprang to life. Something rolled back, and I saw the sunlight dawn. His hand, so thin and wrinkled, yet the hand of an aristocrat, rested on the statue of Pan. I saw it tremble; the trembling spread; he turned to me as if to ask my pardon. 'I fear I must trouble you to wait, Mr. Gade, while I recover myself; I am not so young as I was, and the heat of the day has overcome me.' I gave him a chair and some liqueur and left him, poor gentleman, for I knew it was not heat or age; it was just the flood of hope. When I returned he was standing up—quite recovered. 'There are certain things I would buy of you, Mr. Gade,' he said, 'if you will kindly tell me your price; this one especially'—that one was the Pan. And then came that witch—" He emphasised the words with a bang on the table which made Jerry jump, and brought Toby's face to the door. "That witch—Temptation.

Ach, mein yongling"—such a grave, sweet face it was now—"I am mizaire, I like money so well, and it was a struggle. I knew I could ask moch. 'I will consult my books, my lord,' I said; and then, below, I wrestled with her, that witch, till she fled. But it was one great fight, and then I went to my lord, and without one word he paid me what I asked. There was no address. 'See that they are packed, Mr. Gade,' he said, 'and I will send this afternoon.' "

"And didn't you ask?" questioned Jerry eagerly.

"No!" The Jew hesitated. "He did not wish it known evidently, and"—the dark eyes looked straight into Jerry's—"a gentleman's wishes should be respected. But"—again the hesitation; Jerry leaned forward breathlessly—"but, after he was gone, I looked at the things; it was perhaps idle curiosity," he added apologetically, "we are but frail, and there, in the corner, were initials, G. R., and the date." Jerry's face fell.

"G. R.," he repeated wonderingly, "but they were not my father's initials—"

"Maybe, maybe," replied the Jew; "and yet, perhaps, who knows, they may have been his father's."

The tale was told. In vain Jerry questioned, surmised. Reuben could add nothing, and at last the subject was dismissed. Toby was summoned and the evening passed as before. Only, at the back of Jerry's mind, lay a firm determination that, as he grew older, more experienced in the ways of men and cities, he would find his father's work and the meaning of those unknown initials.

A strange impulse came over him as he undressed. The tiny bag hanging round his neck had grown to be part of himself, and passed as unnoticed as his hands and feet. That night he touched it, turned it over, wondering what it contained; and as he had longed for his twelfth birthday, so now he longed for the day when he should be twenty and free to solve the mystery of the amulet. Thus youth wishes time away.

CHAPTER II

THE SWINEHERD NO LONGER A SWINEHERD. HOW THE BLACK KNIGHT STEPS INTO THE STORY, AND THE WHITE KNIGHT SEEKS THE GOOSE-GIRL, AND OF OTHER THINGS

LONDON, the syren, cast her spells upon Jerry. Softly, lightly, they bound him, yet strong were the silken fetters, and the Jew laughed cheerily at the fulfilment of his prophecy.

"London is like a lovely woman—when she puts out her strength, what man can resist? But take care, take care, mein yongling, wear her chains lightly, else, maybe, they will become fetters of iron. For me—" he shrugged his shoulders, "I can throw them off; not always, but in the wild, sweet country, I find fresh strength to withstand the witchcraft of London city."

There was work—plenty of it. Art was a hard master, though a good servant. Difficulties, overcome, melted away. The casts no longer grinned and chuckled at his attempts; they succumbed and were forgotten. It was life which met him now. To quicken stone and marble, to give expression to sightless eyes, touch to inanimate hands, and life—life, quivering, joyous life—to the perfectly formed figures which grew under his touch. And day after day the youth within him expanded, gaining knowledge and experience, the strength and power of manhood. Outwardly too, was development; the regular life, the atmosphere of comfort and cheeriness, the good food—Reuben owned to a weakness for dainty living, pleading his foreign parentage—had their effect, and every week it seemed that Jerry grew taller and broader, till it became a joke in the household. And with it all was a new feeling.

He began to understand Betty's love of finery. The country-made clothes were gradually exchanged for more modish garments. Often he handled the elegant fob chain, longing, yet not daring to wear it. He had many chances of seeing the latest fashions. Reuben's shop was a favourite lounge in the morning. In those wonderful closed rooms above were stored treasures almost priceless; the result of many years' patient ransacking of England and the continent. Paintings by famous old masters; carved ivories of the middle ages, yellow and stained; fans and snuff boxes from French courts; tapestries embroidered by slender fingers, dust now for hundreds of years; vellum manuscripts, rich with gold and brilliant colourings, the work of patient monks long since gone to their rest; swords, whose hilts and scabbards were masses of fine metal work and precious stones; priceless carpets, gems, and women's jewellery—necklaces, rings, bracelets. To those rooms came noblemen, merchants, lovers of the beautiful, and those who were willing to buy because it was the correct thing to possess antiques. With such the Jew had little patience; but there were others, very often shabbily dressed, some even with a look of starvation in their eyes, who were welcomed at any time. For these, he would sometimes turn off a wealthy client to loiter by their side, tenderly touching the lovely things, telling their history, bringing the centuries near as yesterday, while great names became the names of ordinary men and women as he fingered the things they wore, the furniture they used.

Younger men, the fops of the period, made the place fashionable. A few were collectors, others bought stones and jewels, but the majority came and went without any pretext of buying. It was some time before Jerry knew that the old house held secrets of noble families, and the power in many cases to ruin those who stood in the full sunlight of the great city.

In a small room behind the hall they lay—padlocked boxes, safely closed and barred from prying eyes, held them—parch-

ments, bonds, signed with historic names, waiting redemption. And so the morning saw a constant stream of the youth and fashion of London. Gossip floated airily, cards fell softly on tables set for that purpose, dice rattled, while here and there a slow finger pushed silently and meditatively the carved crimson and white chessmen. And under all ran a current of something deeper, the essence of London's power, the passing of money, the glittering, golden mesh of the syren.

There were times when even the delights of water and clay grew grey against the dazzling pictures spread in the hall below, and Jerry would steal from his work to a spot in the wide gallery, where, safely hidden behind massive furniture, he could see without being seen; and here Toby would join him for a few minutes at a time, frankly delighted to give information. There were names hitherto only known from books, sometimes disappointingly attached. Men of the town, dissipated, weak, sometimes of even vicious appearance; wealthy citizens, fathers, maybe, of future generations of peers, but at present excluded by a hard and fast line called trade. Yet all had their histories, great and small, and Toby's gossip was, unknowingly, brimful of romance; as full indeed as the old stories of childhood.

And in each tale Reuben figured, hard, inexorable in some cases, but in most playing the part of the good genie. Help, pity, rescue, were the notes he struck, and Jerry noticed how, with few exceptions, clients turned to him as friend to friend. There was one in particular.

"His Grace the Duke of Wynderley," whispered Toby, indicating a tall, grave man of forty. "Years ago he went the pace, they say—gaming and women. He used to come here to buy diamonds and emeralds, till Reuben learnt what they were for and refused to sell to him. There was a row, I tell you, and my lord took his custom elsewhere. They say the old duke thanked Reuben himself, but that I don't know—it was before my time, and Reuben doesn't talk. Then the crash came; the town house was sold, with all the plate and

jewels, and Reuben bought them, and ran up against my lord again. It killed the old duke, but it brought his son to his senses, for he wasn't thoroughly bad, and Reuben talked to him like a grandfather. Well, the end was that he lent him money at a low interest, and set him on his feet. In time he bought back everything—hard work, but his grace turned to it like a good 'un; dismissed his steward, and looked after the estate himself, and retrenched everywhere. For the last five years he's been free, got married to a nice lady with plenty of money, and now comes to Reuben for everything. I think he looks upon him as a second father. Oh, he's always doing that sort of thing." Here followed more stories. Jerry listened bewildered.

"And yet he says he's fond of money, and a miser?" Toby's cheerful round face broadened into a grin.

"That's his nonsense, although he really thinks he is. Haven't you seen his jar of beads?" Jerry nodded, remembering the glass bottle on the mantelpiece.

"Well, whenever he helps anyone, or takes less than he's entitled to, he declares he never does it willingly, and each time he crows over it as though he'd gained a victory, and drops a gold bead into the 'jar of good deeds,' as he calls it. At the end of the week he counts them up, and I can tell you there's the dickens to pay if it's shorter than the week before."

And so on, till London became indeed a city of romance, of which Reuben held the keys and Toby was showman. Jerry's longings flew high. To belong to that magic circle whose lives, it seemed to him, were mystical as the lives of gods, whose homes were ancestral, whose names stood through the ages. It was a foolish wish, so utterly impossible, that he thought of it as he thought of the world of Faerie, a beautiful dream.

But another road was open to him—the road to fame and riches. And here was reality; work led that way—work and patience. Of such dreams he could speak. Day after day

rose, waned, and fell into the past, leaving a consciousness of something done, a step gained. The Jew watched approvingly, giving good advice, and teaching of things outside the world of ordinary life. Somehow Jerry recalled long talks with his father, to which he had listened without understanding, yet which now came back, fraught with a new meaning.

Often at night, when all was quiet, they would leave the warm fireside, and passing through silent streets, make their way to the river—flowing, flowing, ever flowing. Here rose the moon—among narrow streets and dark corners it was forgotten—even by the river it was another moon, no longer the friendly, watching face of Cloudesley, but a majestic shining thing, as far apart as the frequenters of the Hall were from its inmates.

And, oh! the squalor, the vileness of London by night. On the river banks, under its dark arches, in bylanes and short cuts, the syren threw aside her golden robes and showed the misery and foulness beneath. Men and women, in filthy rags, with the faces of the lost, slunk from their daytime hiding places, as bats move out at night. What they did Jerry hardly knew. The riverside held its secrets, and the moon above cast long rays of silver, giving evil things beauty and romance.

It cast deceptive shadows too. In some of the faces he saw strange likenesses to people he had known; once a woman brushed swiftly by him; a tall, graceful figure, muffled in a dark cloak. As she passed her hood fell slightly back, and the face was the face of Hester Dyke, older, thinner, yet even more beautiful. Jerry started forward, but it was gone. So quick was the movement that it was unnoticed by Reuben, and Jerry told himself that the idea was only fancy. The Jew cast glances of pity as they went.

"They are the faces of devils," he said, "and they *are* devils now. But not always, ah, not always. Some time they will throw off those vile bodies, and put on new ones, and each one shall be better than the last, and so shall they win freedom

by their own work. You say, the Lord Christ died to give salvation. Maybe, maybe, but it is a lazy religion. Who knows, in the ages gone by, we—you and I, mein yongling—were perhaps as these are; and so, it will all kom right in the end, when the good God, who watches over all, shall see fit. For He is Life, and Life is everywhere—in me, in you, in these poor things, in wood, in stone, in the earth, in the skies—and it is for us to use it well.

Great vistas opened before the boy; problems, riddles—broadening his outlook, widening his sympathies, bringing him in such close contact with those dear ones that he could hear the well known voice at times. "Be good, Jerry boy; be gentle, be true, and all will come right."

It was one summer morning in the height of the season. London was wearing her sweetest smile. Green trees in the parks whispered love stories to each other, flowers in the gardens shed sweet fragrance, youth donned its daintiest garments and went a merrymaking, and the great heart of London throbbed and beat in unison.

Jerry had stolen from his work and was sitting at the peep-hole in the gallery with Toby, off duty for a while, by his side. Below, the stream of custom, the murmur of voices, went on as usual. The size of the peep-hole necessitated close proximity; shoulders and heads touched each other. Toby's cheerful voice babbled its stories, then suddenly stopped. Something, a thrill of coldness, seemed to run through him, communicating itself to Jerry. Surprised, he turned. A look was on the round, good-humoured face—a look, which he remembered to have seen once or twice before, particularly on that first night—a look of fear, of fascination. He was gazing at the bend of the staircase—someone had come in and was turning into the main hall, a tall, slight man; young, dark, slender, foppish in his dress, and with an air, which in one less aristocratic might have been termed rakish.

For a moment he stood, casting a glance over the assembled company, a glance almost contemptuous; the thin dark lips

seemed to curl cynically, yet it might have been their natural expression. Reuben, displaying a case of Indian workmanship, lifted his eyes as the stranger advanced, then dropped them quickly. Jerry fancied he had no liking for the newcomer.

"Who is it, Toby?" he asked. His companion paused a moment; the look of fear was gone, but so was the light cheerfulness.

"Who is—which do you mean?" Jerry nodded to the stranger, now shaking hands and exchanging greetings with acquaintances.

"That? Oh, that's Sir Francis Crewe."

"Sir Francis Crewe." The name recalled memories. He cast back in his mind and placed it. Francis Crewe was the boy who had fought Paul.

"Does he live in London?" he whispered. "I haven't seen him here before."

"No," Toby answered briefly. "He's been away for a year. His father was ill."

"And is he dead?" asked Jerry, noticing now that the object of his interest was attired in deep mourning.

"Yes. He's Sir Francis now."

The Jew looked up. Toby, knowing the signal, hurried away, and Jerry sat on alone. He watched, with fascinated eyes, the elegant figure as it passed from one to another, and was even more conscious of his own height, and breadth, and ungainly movements. Unconsciously, almost as a child imitates, he caught, during the months which followed, something of the other's courtly grace and carriage, though never to any great extent.

Sir Francis Crewe was known and quoted in fashionable circles. What he wore to-day the world would wear to-morrow. His gestures, words, nay, even his expressions, were mimicked, and report said that he could marry any woman at court, not excepting some who were unnamed, even by gossip.

The new baronet seemed at present to have no thought

of marriage; he was here, there, everywhere, like a butterfly newly hatched, trying his wings; settling would come later. All this Jerry learned by the way; beyond answering questions, Toby never mentioned him, and Jerry wondered at times what had caused that sudden look of fear. For fear it was, and for many a long month it lay somewhere at the back of the round rosy face, ready to appear at an unexpected moment—a rapping at the door, a quick call from Reuben, more than all, at unexpected visits from Sir Francis himself. He would come at all times, despite the fact that the Jew treated him with scant respect. And at his slightest command Toby cringed like a whipped dog. There were times when he would go with him for hours at a stretch, returning with some excuse that so good a customer must not be neglected.

It was at such times that a different atmosphere crept into the cheerful household; an atmosphere taking Jerry back to those dark days in the cottage. He wondered if it were fancy, and, if so, what connection was there between him and Sir Francis Crewe, or whether Toby really had something on his mind. Some days the shadow seemed to lift and Toby was his own gay self, busy, light-hearted, carolling his ditty as though with never a care in the world:

Begone, Dull Care; I prithee, begone from me.

In work and play, in shade and sunshine, the summer days passed. London shook off the gay throng and showed a dull, sullen face to the world. Her magic toils relaxed under the August sun; work grew wearisome, even ambition dwindled to an occasional thought only. Cloudesley, the dim, leafy lanes, cool, where breezes murmured, and tiny springs dripped in the rocks, the hot yellow cornfields, and Mrs. Chubbe's grey shadowy dairy, held out alluring hands to Jerry.

Why not? He had plenty of money. Several evenings he met the coach as it drew up at the inn in the Strand. Daniel, in very few words, gave him news, and the little village seemed

every day to draw him nearer. But a holiday would mean work lost, money spent, and in the end he put away temptation.

Not so Reuben. At night all seemed as usual, but in the morning he was gone.

"Packed up his traps and went," said Toby, laughing; "and we shall be alone now for weeks, perhaps months. It's nothing," he added, seeing Jerry's wondering look, "he does it every year. He'll turn up one day when he's had enough of a roving life." It seemed strange without the kindly presence, the genial personality. Jerry had no liking for it, and said so; Toby grew vehement.

"It's no use telling him how he's missed, he wouldn't believe. Never had anyone so low an opinion of himself." A break came in the monotony. It was one Saturday evening. Jerry, working in his room, was disturbed by Toby, Toby with a face of delight.

"Gentleman wants you," he said. "No, he wouldn't give his name—said he'd surprise you."

There in the entrance stood Paul, his thin dark face full of friendly welcome, his eyes sparkling at Jerry's astonishment.

"Paul!"

"Jer, old fellow, how are you?" Jerry had his hand, holding it so tightly that its owner winced.

"Jerry, you giant. Do you realise that your hand's a vice, and mine, well—" he laughed and looked down at the slight white fingers released from the iron grasp. Jerry followed his glance somewhat ruefully.

"I'm really very sorry, Paul; I forgot how strong I was."

"Yes," he smiled, "just the same old Jerry; big and solemn and thoughtful. Take me somewhere, will you, and let's have our talk out. How did you get here? I only came back last night. I'm going down to Cloudesley to-morrow, and I thought I'd give you a look in. Betty told me all about you."

They were making their way upstairs; Paul threw inquisitive glances round as they mounted. In Jerry's room his in-

terest culminated. He looked curiously at the massive furniture, the thick carpet, then sauntered to the window, gave a long glance downwards, and turned.

"How did you manage it, Jerry? Who is this Reuben Gade, and where did you come across him? You're in clover here; tell me all about it." Nothing loath, Jerry launched forth, from the buying of the book in the beginning.

"So he's your pedlar," cried Paul in astonishment. "Why, what does he want with peddling? He must be a rich man."

And explanations had to be given, more questions asked, till the subject was thrashed dry, and it was Paul's turn to relate. Sitting there in the bend of the window Jerry could see the length of the street, the golden balls gleaming in the light of the lamp, the few stray passers-by, loiterers, or now and then, one, who with stealthy steps, sought the doorway beneath. He knew now why that side was boarded up. Reuben, in his feeling for others, refused to let goods in pawn, or even those past redemption, be exposed to prying eyes.

"I would not like my neighbour to see my poverty," he had said.

Paul gossipped on; questioning, then relating, and Jerry listened to tales of far-off lands, as to some fairy tale of childhood. There was no moon, and the street below lay in darkness, save for the flickering lamp at the corner. People had gone home, night birds were not yet out, and loneliness fell. So silent was everything, that the stealthy opening of a door somewhere, sounded loud, even in the room.

Gazing abstractedly through the window, Jerry's attention was caught by a movement under the golden balls. It was a customer leaving, yet what customer could be in the shop so late? Toby had locked up an hour ago. Surprised, he watched; Paul, facing him, saw nothing and talked on. Slowly the door opened, and Toby's face peeped out. It had lost its cheerful smile, but the look on it was not fear for himself, rather watchfulness. Presently it withdrew. Through the door, someone gave a hurried glance up and down; Toby fol-

lowed to the threshold. The second figure pressed something into his hand and passed rapidly down the street. There was no mistaking its slight elegance, and a gleam of light on the face as it turned showed the dark, haughty features. Toby watched him go, then, with a quick movement and a curious sound of angry hatred, he hurled something from him and vanished within. It fell far off, with the ring of money.

Full of wonderment, Jerry's eyes followed the baronet to the end of the narrow street. Just before he turned, another figure, that of a tall woman, closely veiled, stole quietly from beneath a porch, and noiselessly, with a gliding footstep, followed. Something in the figure even beneath its draperies brought back the remembrance of Hester Dyke, and with it, the conviction that his first impulse had been right. It was Hester he had seen; moreover, this woman was the same.

Paul talked on; it may be that in the darkness his friend's absorption was not noticed.

The woman passed like a ghost, as silent, as swiftly. At the corner a gust of wind caught the lamp; its flame scattered, then flared up, throwing strange shadows. In its gleam another shadow seemed to emerge from its lurking place, the light sank, but it remained; then moved, stealthily, cautiously, hugging the dark wall, till Jerry hardly knew if it were real or a shape sprung from the darkness and flickering flame. Creeping, lurking, a thing of blackness, it went along, vanishing at length where the street dissolved into dark spaces.

What did it mean? In an ordinary way he would have taken little notice, such things were common enough. The presence of Toby and Sir Francis Crewe as actors gave a significance to the incident. Jerry, learning experience in the ways of the world, put this and that together, and concluded that Toby held perhaps some secret of the baronet's. Yet, why should he? Was it possible that he owed money? And why should he require money? Jerry turned it over and over, pondering the whys and wherefores. Paul's voice broke on his musings.

"So you see, old fellow, I shan't be back again for a few weeks. My father intends spending Christmas in London, so I shall see you then, I hope very often. Term starts in January, and at Easter we go abroad for a short time. Cloudesley to-morrow. Hurrah, Jerry!" He leaned forward and laid his hand on his friend's arm. "You can't think how I'm counting the hours—the minutes—till I get there. Often, among glorious mountains and wild valleys, I've thought of peaceful little Cloudesley, the fields and woods in the spring-time, and the pond where we used to sit and play fairy tales, you and I and—and—" his voice dropped, "and—Betty. Jerry, what's she like? You've seen her since I have. Is she just as beautiful?"

"Beautiful?" Jerry looked uncertain. He had never thought about it. Was Betty beautiful? Suddenly another face rose up, fair, sweet, with deep blue eyes, and hair like the cornfields in summer. That was beauty, indeed. He shook his head.

"I never thought of Betty as being beautiful."

"Betty not beautiful!" Paul's voice was indignant. "Why, she's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen, and I've seen a few. I don't think you know what you are talking about."

The lamp outside gave a flicker and went out, leaving the room in darkness and bringing the two to their feet.

"Jer, it must be nearly midnight. I must get off. I wouldn't miss that coach for all the gold in the world." Jerry made a light and accompanied him downstairs.

"Good-bye, Jer, old fellow."

"Good-bye, Paul, good-bye. See you again soon."

"Yes, at Christmas."

He was gone. Jerry watched him cross the square and turn into a by street; then closed and barred the massive door and went to bed.

CHAPTER III

WHICH TELLS OF THE GOOSE-GIRL AND THE WHITE KNIGHT, AND HOW THE BLACK KNIGHT FOUGHT AND WAS VANQUISHED

THE pedlar came home, satiated with the country.

"There is wickedness in the country," said he; "yes, as much as in London, only she hides it differently. The veil of London is gold and glitter, and it is called Pleasure, but that of the country is green and soft and restful, and she calls it Peace. But they are both veils to hide their wickedness."

"He's always like this," whispered Toby. "Things seem to upset him more in the country. I expect he's been hearing all sorts of tales. They talk so much more there, you know. He'll be himself in a day or two."

Which prophecy was verified. The pedlar put off his travelling clothes and became Reuben Gade, the business man, the kind master, and gentle friend. Walks and talks were resumed, and the empty hall was again filled with the presence of its owner; Jerry's work went better, customers flocked again, and Toby's song carolled from kitchen regions:

Begone, Dull Care; I prithee, begone from me.

And Christmas brought Paul. The broad light of day showed him older, changed in many ways. The dark thin face was thinner and longer, the black eyes deepened with knowledge of men and the world. He had adopted a loose style of dress, and wore his hair according to the fashion of the day among those who worshipped the young poet of the early century. Its short curls rested against his low collar,

fastened with a loose silk tie. There was none of the stylish elegance of Sir Francis, but in his own way Paul challenged comparison. A woman, unbiassed, perhaps could hardly have put one before the other. Remembering the quarrel, Jerry made no mention of his name. Sir Francis being out of town, there was no meeting, and Paul went off to Oxford without an idea that the same roof which sheltered his friend often covered his enemy.

The visit to Cloudesley was not altogether satisfactory; Betty, home from the convent only some three months, was not yet settled down, and her aunt, contrary to all expectations and much to the surprise of neighbours, allowed her infinite freedom. From a lovely child she had developed into a lovely maiden, with the manners and ease of a lady born, and the refinement which comes of constant intercourse with good women.

But the old Betty was still there; wilful, passionate, daring, and the farm woke up again after its quiet sleep of years. The farmer's eyes rarely left her; they would follow every graceful movement, every pretty action, and when, in the winter evenings, she perched herself upon his knee, and put her arms round his neck, there was nothing in the world that he could deny her.

Mrs. Chubbe, too, watched; but, mingled with admiring pride, was an expression almost apprehensive. Did she remember my lady's words? Or was it only a mother's fear of the world, and its pitfalls and temptations?

Betty herself, light hearted, careless, happy, sang through the house, decked herself in her little bits of finery, and tried her prentice hand on the village lads, who, nothing loath, responded nobly. Mrs. Chubbe's fears vanished, her scolding tongue returned, and Miss Betty was threatened with "service."

"The child'll have her head turned," she said, "with all this gallivantin' an' nonsense. The sooner she's at work the better." The farmer slowly pressed in a plug of tobacco, drew

a spill from the shelf, pushed it between the bars, and lit his pipe.

"Our Betty don't go to service, missis," he said, taking a long draw, and puffing out a cloud of sweet smoke.

Mrs. Chubbe turned sharply from the fire.

"Why not, pray, I should like to know?" she answered testily. "Service was good enough for me an' you, an' service'll be good enough for her, I'm thinkin'."

"No," the farmer took his pipe out and gazed solemnly into the fire. "No," he lifted the tankard of ale at his side, took a deep, fortifying draught, put his pipe in again, and set the measure down with a decisive thump. "This home's been too quiet for my likin' the few years past, an' now the child's home, why, to tell the honest truth, missis, I can't spare her again. An' as long as I've got a roof an' a bit, she'll stay wi' us, service or no service, an' that's my last word, missis." Mrs. Chubbe laid down her knitting and shook her head at him.

"You be as artful as Old Nick hisself, master. You'll let me go on an' on thinkin' I'm gettin' my way, an' then, all of a sudden like, you'll out an' say me nay, an' when you say it like that, I know 'tain't no good to strive against you." The farmer chuckled.

"I couldn't spare her, wife—" and Mrs. Chubbe burst out:

"No more couldn't I, Matthew, an' that's the solemn truth; no more'n I could spare the sunshine, an' so we'll keep her to home. But work she must."

"Aye," interrupted the farmer, "work's good for all. Gi' her the dairy, wife." But Mrs. Chubbe shot out her horns again.

"If 'tisn't just like a man. Gi' her the dairy! A giddy, thoughtless wench like our Betty, wi' the milk o' six cows to deal wi'? No, no, master, she shall ha' the care o' the poultry yard, an' the makin' o' the butter, an' that's enough for the present."

"Well, well," agreed the farmer.

"An' as soon as the young count's gone she shall start.

'Twould be hard on her now he's here, an' likely wantin' her when her hand's in the butter—but after—"

With a shake of the head, Mrs. Chubbe bent over her work and dismissed the subject; the long pipe smoked steadily on. There was a silence, broken at last by the farmer.

"Missis," she looked up, startled by the tone, "d'ye think it's wise?"

"Wise?" repeated his wife interrogatively.

"They're but young things, an'—an'—" The farmer bent, frowned, knocked the ashes from his pipe into the fire, and laid it beside him thoughtfully. "Betty's a good looking lass, an' he's—a gentleman. 'Twould be better to set her to work, wife."

Mrs. Chubbe's head was bent over her work. Her husband watched her curiously and waited, but there was no reply.

"Best be on the safe side—she'll have nought to do wi' the village lads; but there's no many lasses could say nay to the young count, an' so I say, 'Steer on the safe side.' Now, if it had been our Jerry?"

"Jerry!" Mrs. Chubbe pushed back her chair with a quick grating sound and dropped her work angrily. "Jerry! 'twill be time to think o' him when he's made his way i' the world. All my Lady Kezzy's fine talk of what he's goin' to do wi' his bits o' clay and water—what good's them likely goin' to do him? A deal better ha' stayed here, an' made a farmer of him. Our Betty's not for the likes o' him. Not but what I'm fond o' the boy, for he's a good boy; but he's not good enough for her, an' that's *my* last word, master. 'Sides which, he hasn't asked her yet, an' you can take my word for it, hasn't a thought for her 'cept as a sister, nor she for him." Gathering up her work she rose with a bustling finality, turned down the lamp, and bidding the farmer see to bolts and bars, flounced out of the room.

"Jerry!" she ejaculated contemptuously, when safe in the shelter of her own room. "Jerry!" Opening and shutting

drawers with vigorous bangs seemed to work off righteous indignation. She put away her work, shook up the pillows, wound up her watch and hung it in the pocket of the bed curtain, then, taking off the lace collar she wore in the afternoon, she shook it, wrapped it in white paper and laid it in a drawer. A sudden thought seemed to strike her; she drew the drawer further out, lifted various articles from it, finally fetching up a soft parcel, neatly tied in tissue paper. Before opening it, she shot to the bolt of the door. "Best be on the safe side," she murmured, turning back the wrappings with gentle fingers. Inside the many layers, lavender scented, lay a crimson sash, broad, long, and softly rich. Mrs. Chubbe unfolded it, gazing long and lovingly as she ran it through her hands, then carefully put it away again and closed the drawer.

"Jerry, indeed!—an' with a thing like that?" she muttered with vague meaning. "All right—" as the farmer shook the door. "Don't you be in such a mighty hurry; I'm comin'."

And so Betty's freedom continued, free from work, free from care, free from every tie. It was not until the last night of his stay that Paul spoke of that which was uppermost. They were coming home from Channington in the late winter afternoon; the snow crumbled and bound under their feet, frost glittered on every twig. The sunset's crimson glow fell on her face, tinting the paleness. Paul slipped his arm through hers, drawing her close.

"Betty, do you remember once, long ago, in this place, I asked you if you'd marry me? Do you remember?" She turned her face coquettishly from his, the sparkling, vivid face, in its youthful beauty, and nodded.

"Betty, I ask you again, will you marry me? I am not rich, but there's enough for us, and in the future—I hope very far off—there'll be plenty, and you'll be a countess. Will you, Betty?" He had stopped and was bending over her, still holding her arm. "Ah, Betty, you don't know how I've wanted you—how I want you. Every day, every hour, every minute, I love you more. All the beautiful world is

nothing without you. Will you, Betty? Soon I shall have finished at Oxford, and then—then—"

His voice broke in its intensity; he would have drawn her nearer, would have lifted her to his heart, but there was no soft yielding in the slender form beside him, no hint of passionate longing, of the abandonment which tells of love.

"Betty, dearest, you promised."

"Oh, Paul." She turned her head; the dark eyes with their love and longing might have swayed her. "I'm so young, I've seen nothing yet; I want, oh, ever so many things."

It was the old cry. Even at that moment Paul smiled, loving her all the more for the answer. He drew her closer, and slid his arm round her. She made no resistance, yet there was no sign of yielding.

"What do you want, Betty? There's nothing you shall not have—money, friends, gaiety, anything." She stood silent, half turned from him, one little foot tracing patterns in the snow. Paul waited, then went on.

"New clothes, Betty, you shall have them every day. Jewels? Betty, you love sparkling things, I'd have the diamonds re-set for you, and the emeralds. Oh, Betty," he almost forgot the present, as a vision rose of his love, the gleaming green stones resting on her fair neck, flashing from her copper red hair, clasping the round white arms. The same magic must have conjured up a similar picture in her mind, for she lifted her face with a deep gasp of delight.

"Oh, Paul—emeralds? How lovely—but—" she shook her head, and turned again to the weaving of patterns.

"But what?" Suddenly she turned, laid her soft face against him, her little mittened hand on his arm.

"Paul, I do like you very, very much, but I like something better." The thrill of her touch, the rapture of holding her, turned him giddy. He would have lifted her face to his, but she pushed his hand away.

"What is it, Betty, that you love more than you love me?" he whispered.

"My—freedom—" came in low tones.

"You shall have it, Betty. Dearest, you shall be as free as a bird; you shall come and go without any questioning from me. Only love me, Betty, and promise that some day you'll come to me for ever."

"No," she drew herself from his reluctant arms and stood upright. "No. That would not be freedom. Come," she put her arm in his, "let us go, and forget this. Before I promise anything to any man I must see more. You don't really mind, dear Paul, do you?"

He knew she was fancy free. The cool, endearing term alone would have told him. Not yet had love shot his arrow into Betty's heart, not yet had she known the sweetness of his chains. Freedom! Paul could have laughed, but for the aching in his heart. Having once been love's prisoner, who would wish for liberty?

He whispered something of this as they walked slowly on, urging, persuading, but Betty stood firm. He lifted her over the last stile, then, still holding her, put the final question.

"Betty, is there anyone else you love?"

"No, Paul." The answer rang clear and true; he breathed a sigh of relief.

"One question more, dearest, and I'll let you go. Betty, if —if—anyone asks you—what I've asked you—will you tell me first—before anyone else? Let me hear your answer from you —will you?" And again came the answer, innocent as a child's.

"Yes, of course, Paul. You shall be the very first one to be told. But I don't think there'll be anyone else. It's only that I want to see things." And with that he let her go. It was not altogether unsatisfactory; she was heart whole; and in little Cloudesley who should win her from him? Sooner or later he must prevail and gain her love.

Paul's castle grew that night like Aladdin's palace. Fair and glorious, its turrets and spires stretching into the sky, the fairest castle that ever was built, and in his dreams Betty

threw off her gown of homespun, and wore a glittering robe of silver, with a glamour of green emeralds and sparkling diamonds. Long ago he had told her she was like a princess. A princess! A queen! Queen of beauty, queen of his heart, queen to rule wherever she dwelt. His last thought was that queens must be guarded. Cloudesley and he would guard their queen, and some day, under his wing, she should see the beautiful world.

The farmer breathed more freely after Paul's departure. Though not perhaps of brilliant intelligence, he was quick-witted enough to have caught the whisper of the village: "Mrs. Chubbe's bringing up that gal o' hers like a lady, an' she'll live to rue the day." Also he read in my Lady Karen's face an expression meaning, "I wash my hands of such doings; I warned you long ago."

It hurt his pride, and Matthew Chubbe had more than his share of that sturdy independent pride which, while deferring socially to its betters in station, knows no superior in the sight of God. Paul was gone, however; for the time the unpleasantness was over. When he returned, Betty would have settled to the life of a farmer's daughter, and there would be no time for gallivanting.

Which hope seemed to be fulfilled. Betty took to the work willingly. The old hens were a constant source of amusement to her, while looking after them, even to her aunt's satisfaction, and the soft downy chicks roused something very tender in the dark, flashing eyes. The butter, too, seemed to come by magic, and not even in her dream silks and jewels could Betty have looked lovelier than in the shadowy dairy, with its low colourings of greys and browns and creamy whiteness. Nature, too, lent a hand, tanning and flushing the delicate paleness of her cheeks, filling out the slender figure, giving the fresh ness and fragrance of wind, and dew, and sun, and perfumed things.

The whispers died away; the village showed its surprise, almost its disappointment, that its forebodings had not come

to pass, and my Lady Karen even condescended to visit the dairy when Betty was making up the butter for market and express her approval.

"Mother Monica and the sisters have shown themselves sensible women, Keziah," she said that evening. "They've put no absurd notions into the girl's head; she seems to have taken up her proper position without any nonsense. I own I never expected her to settle in Cloudesley. And she's kept her good looks; yes—" my lady laid her work in her lap and spoke thoughtfully, "I must say the child made an impression on me; indeed, she is very winsome." Lady Kezzy listened delightedly.

"I was sure, sister, that Betty always meant well; she is young, and girls are thoughtless and giddy."

"Yes," Lady Karen answered musingly. Youth, with its careless light-heartedness, thrust itself flauntingly before her, and memories of that dear one, gay, careless, beautiful, even as Betty herself, rose up in her mind. Her sister probably had the same thought, and for a short time both ladies sat silent, living again the past. The entrance of the tea tray sent memories flying back to their own place, and the evening finished as usual.

But underneath Betty's demure exterior lay longings and cravings, and all sorts of strange emotions. The convent had taught self-control, and she kept them to herself. Indeed, there was no one to whom she could speak of such things, and even if there had been, it is doubtful if such vague, intangible feelings could have been put into words. The farmer might have understood, Jerry have sympathised, having had much the same experience. But only a woman could have told her that it was the passing of childhood, the desire for knowledge of a sphere beyond little Cloudesley, the craving of an eager, restless nature for excitement, life, morally speaking, a ride on the merry-go-round of the world. Jerry's letters, without meaning to do so, intensified these longings. What wonder that the dull monotony palled slightly as the months went by?

The farmer saw and understood; his wife saw, understood, and chided. But both did what they could in the way of small gaieties. Market day saw Betty in the covered place, demurely seated, knitting in hand, on a low chair, beside her white-draped stall, temptingly spread with yellow butter, brown eggs, and limp poultry. The farmers' wives and daughters were friendly, yet, somehow, between them and the innkeeper's niece a broad gulf fixed itself, indefinable, yet always apparent. There were neighbourly visits, little outings, in which she joined with all a young girl's pleasure, but she made no intimate friends, keeping her best for home. There were times when the farmer wondered; he knew that, beneath the sweetness, the ready smile, the loving embrace, lay something deeper, only waiting the touch of a magic wand to stir it into a vigorous, seething life.

So the spring and early summer passed. Paul and his father went abroad during the long vacation, and to Betty, counting the weeks to his return, came a feeling of anger, that after such professions of love, he had not troubled to stay with her and break the monotony. True, he had snatched a couple of days before he started, and his letters were as frequent as possible for letters to be; many a time did Mrs. Chubbe remark on the cost of franking. But there was a reason for Paul's seeming neglect. Village rumours had reached his ear, and should a knight allow even a breath to tarnish the fair fame of his princess? Till she owned to loving him, even if it killed him he would not molest her. To carry her banner high and glorious, unsullied through a world where an idle word might smirch its glittering surface, proclaiming his lady's beauty and virtue throughout Christendom, might have been Paul's mission had he lived in earlier ages. As it was, he was only conscious of a hungry desire to shield and protect her from everything that had the faintest suspicion of ugliness.

Day after day, night after night, came the wild longing to take her, guard her, love her—to build a hedge for so fair a flower, a high wall where none but he could enter—a garden

of flowers, of sunshine, of everlasting love. For such is love's young dream—and youth knows not that true love is freedom, that its chains are rosy garlands reaching throughout space, yet ever drawing their captives with them. And amongst Pan's merry May music which calls to lovers and loved ones, runs the harshness of spring, of youth, of nature; but beneath, to those who can hear it, flows a deeper, fuller strain, melodious, ever recurring.

He whispered something of this while urging his suit, and the whisper woke Betty's vanity, making her toss her saucy head till the red-gold curls glittered again.

"How silly you are, Paul," she cried; "as though I couldn't take care of myself." He caught her, holding her close in spite of her laughing struggles.

"Betty, Betty, give me the right to guard you, to come here openly as your lover. You're so young and pretty, and," his voice dropped to the old words, the world's refrain, "I love you, Betty, I love you so." She freed herself, still laughing, her breath coming quick with the exertion, her face flushed.

"I don't want to, Paul; I keep telling you; not yet, anyhow." He stood for a moment gravely watching her; then took her hands.

"Betty, I can't wait much longer. I must know before I return to Oxford; you must tell me when I come back." She loosened a hand and slipped it under his arm.

"Very well, Paul, I'll tell you then—" adding saucily, "Perhaps." And do what he would, he could get no other answer.

During those summer months she did her work as usual, moving demurely among the feathered brood, patting and kneading the butter in the cool dairy, and only she herself knew the turmoil within—the clamour of mixed longings, of love, of freedom, and the dread of the hive of bees she would bring about her head if she accepted Paul. The count's anger, Lady Karen's cold contempt, Lady Kezzy's tears and disappointment, the gossip of the village. Betty, refined by

nature, doubly so with convent training, shrank from the picture. There also still remained, against all reason, a little pique that Paul should think she was not able to take care of herself. Altogether, Betty was in that state of mind when a diversion proves a welcome relief. And it came, suddenly overwhelming her with its quick flood.

Paul returned, but not to Oxford. Once more my lord threw open the doors of Cloudesley, once more the village roused to echoes of London voices, of London footfalls. Down came the Marquis of Fleet, still in his travelling berlin, an old man now, too old to make changes, he said; down came Captain Culpepper, greyer, somewhat wrinkled, but upright and soldierly, as becomes an officer of his Majesty. Down, too, came Lord Henry Sands, no longer a younger brother. Smallpox had carried off the duke when love and hope had tinted the world rose colour. The title descended, sobering the wild young peer. No longer did he drive tandem; Sir Francis Crewe did so instead, and the superb black horses, perfectly matched, fresh and fiery, and the cold handsome features of their owner, divided between them the admiration of the villagers.

Again the great gates were set open, again the quiet house put on its gala dress, again my lord entertained his guests, as royalty entertains. The count and his son arrived a week later; they had been detained in Paris, and Paul's first visit was to Betty—Betty, loving, sweet, yet still undecided. And so, from day to day, she put off her answer, now almost yielding, now reiterating the demand for freedom, till the Thursday before the Saturday fixed for the breaking up of the party.

The fortnight had, as before, tried the landlady's patience. Well for those servants and grooms who were frequenters of the Cloudesley Arms that its mistress had no hand in the serving of them; they might have heard unpalatable home truths. Betty, certainly, no longer needed watching; the gaiety of the village possessed no charm for her, and she was apt to laugh and agree with her aunt when she wished it over.

Very few of the company knew that the inn covered aught but its master and mistress.

Yet there were certain of the older guests who were welcomed by Mr. Chubbe as friends of the past. To the old marquis and one or two others, the farmer would proudly, and with their leave, present his niece. It was on one such occasion that Francis Crewe happened to be of the party. He had accompanied them, half from an invitation to do so, half to while away an hour or two of a visit only undertaken for personal motives, and becoming every day more irksome.

He sat somewhat apart, sipping his wine and letting his thoughts run to London. The conversation had turned on topics at least thirty years old, of no interest whatever to him. He heard the door open behind, the talk suddenly flag. Presently a light footfall passed close to him, a soft dress brushed against his chair. The murmur of voices went on, broken by a new one, clear, low, vibrating—the voice of a lady. Wondering somewhat, he raised his eyes. She was pouring out wine for the marquis, who held his glass. Standing there, the cobwebby bottle in her small brown hand, the dimples coming and going in her sunburnt face, the dark eyes coquettishly lowered, she might have posed for Hebe.

She placed the bottle on the table, inclined her head smilingly, as the marquis, his hand on his heart, bowed in courtly fashion ere he lifted his glass to his lips, then raised her head, caught the ardent glance fixed upon her and flushed rosily red. The flush spread from the white neck, veiled neath its muslin handkerchief, to the roots of the copper-gold hair, and in an instant each knew that remembrance had come to the other.

"By gad, what a beauty!" murmured Sir Francis, Cloudesley taking on a new value. But Betty said nothing, only, in her room that night the hot colour surged and burned as she thought of that other time. With all a woman's instinct she knew that he would come again, and the sense of power to draw a fine London gentleman was like incense to Betty's vanity. He came, a message from my ladies to Mrs. Chubbe on the subject

of dairy produce, forming the pretext. Soft words, flattery, and praise of the landlady's housewifery, did the rest.

Betty, busy making elderberry wine, knew that the handsome bold eyes were fixed on her, knew that she was worth looking at, in spite of the plain stuff dress and crimson stained fingers, and, with a shy side glance, coyly raised the long, curling lashes. It was enough. Taking a measure of corn, she started out to the yard; within five minutes he joined her, and, half-frightened, half-flattered, Betty chattered gaily, using all her girlish arts to test this sudden new-found power.

It was no fresh experience to Francis Crewe; yet beauty such as this came not every day, and even his blunted nature received a fresh fillip in the youthful loveliness and innocent coquetries of this country maiden. Fascinated, he found his way to the farmhouse again and again. Betty, trying her wings, knew them to be strong and powerful, and forthwith began that dangerous game played since time began—which will be played till time is no more. Little wonder that Paul's answer tarried. But of Paul, Betty said nothing, and the days passed in one delicious flutter, while Cloudesley no longer seemed irksome to Sir Francis.

The last day came; he left her, after extracting a half promise to allow him to write. In the afternoon came Paul, pleading, urging, using every argument he could think of; but she would give no answer, only promising to love him dearly always—always, and perhaps, some day, when she was quite, quite old and tired of seeing things, she would think about getting married. But to the suggestion of anything more she refused to listen. So Paul had to leave, his fate hanging in the balance.

"But you'll write to me, Betty, won't you?" he pleaded. "I shall write every day, and you will answer? Dearest, say you will." The dark arched eyebrows went up; there was a little look of fear.

"Paul, you mustn't write too often. Aunt Martha would wonder and ask questions."

"And what if she did? Tell her, Betty." She shook her head decisively.

"No, I'm not going to be scolded. Oh, Paul"—a little weary sigh—"I do wish you wouldn't worry so. Can't you understand that I won't—I won't," with an emphatic stamp, "be tied. I'll write, sometimes, and you can, sometimes, but not too often." Again came the feeling of protection, the remembrance of village tongues. He knew that every letter was turned over and commented upon by the post mistress, and, knowing it, he understood.

"Very well, Betty, so be it. I shall write as often as you let me, until you tell me it is too often." She stretched her white arms upwards as though the subject wearied her.

"Don't expect too much from me," she said, laughing; "but I'll write, Paul, I really will. And now I must go; it's tea time, and Aunt Martha will be calling me. You can come in before you go to-morrow and say good-bye."

Church Clock struck the half hour after six as he hastened homewards. Not too much time to dress for the seven o'clock dinner. It was a state affair that night—the last of the visit. Course succeeded course, side dishes fluttered in between, removes ushered in still more dishes, and when at last the glistening cloth was lifted, and the dark mahogany reflected silver gilt epergnes and gleaming candelabra, it was nearly ten o'clock. Some of the older men found it long, and after the usual toasts of "The King—God bless him" and "The Ladies," left the room with their host, and apologies to the younger men, without sitting long over the port.

The thick, rose-cut decanters went round and round, tongues, even discreet ones, loosened, stories, light, ribald, passed from mouth to mouth, toasts were given, and talk veered from gossip to scandal, from scandal even to names. There was a general loosening of cravats, flushed faces told their own tale, and through it all ran that suggestion of self-control relaxed, which comes with wine. It was the moment when older and

wiser men would have dispersed the company. Failing that, glasses were re-filled, more toasts given and drunk, and the excitement grew and strained, like a tightened wire, which, stretched to its utmost tension, hummed and sang higher, shriller, to breaking point.

Already several heads nodded, and legs stretched further beneath the polished table. Unsteady hands poured more wine, leaving small trickling streams, voices grew thicker, and the candles burnt low. A toast, the name of a reigning beauty, roused every man for a moment, though he sank back the next. A few, only slightly the worse for drink, maintained the conversation, if conversation it could be called, among them Sir Francis Crewe, upon whom no wine seemed to have any effect, and Paul, who, from no great liking for it, had drunk sparingly. But even on those few it had had a certain effect.

A cavalry officer, who had been dozing heavily, suddenly awoke, stumbled unsteadily to his feet, and waving a glass in his unsteady hands, hiccoughed the name of a well known dancer.

"'Shure you—gentlemen—most peerlesh beauty—in—in—thish—town. Genelm'n—Louish—da—Shilva—Lile—Lu." The company, such of it as could, stood upon its legs, glasses waved frantically, for it was a popular toast.

"Louise da Silva, Little Lu," came the shout, and each man sank back, either on to his chair or the floor, sometimes helped back, sometimes pushed further under. Sir Francis rose, his dark face flushed, his eyes glittering, the lace at his throat falling open, the diamonds on his fingers flashing as he lifted his glass.

"Gentlemen—Major Crowley has given us as a toast, an elf—a fairy—our Lulu. I'll give you another to a new found beauty. Gentlemen, a beauty, to whom Louise is a hag." A little subdued hiss went round. Sir Francis bowed. "I mean, gentlemen, figuratively speaking. One day, perhaps, you yourselves may judge of their comparative merits. Gentlemen, fill

your glasses to the brim, and drink deeply to the greatest beauty in the world, the daughter of the Cloudesley Arms—Betty Chubbe."

"Betty Chubbe, Betty Chubbe," came the roar of voices, the tinkle of glasses, the scraping of heavy chairs quickly pushed back. Then clear, through the hubbub, Paul's voice.

"Gentlemen, I call upon you to take back that toast. Sir Francis, you forget yourself. A lady's name cannot be coupled with the name of a London light-o'-love. Take back your toast, I say; apologise, or, by the Lord—"

He strode to the end of the table where Sir Francis stood, glass in hand, staring in wonderment. Presently a slow smile of enlightenment curved the cynical lips.

"I understand. Gentlemen, as gentlemen, we understand. This," he glanced round, the curl on his lips deepening, "this lady belongs to our friend." He bowed to Paul. "I hardly gave him credit for the discovery of so much beauty. Yet, under the circumstances, I fail to see the need of an apology. The lady is without peer, one day doubtless will be the toast of every club in London. Gentlemen, again I give you, Betty Chubbe."

There was a subdued murmur, like the threatening of a distant storm. Paul moved nearer, his voice, thick with rage, controlled.

"Again, sir, I call upon you to apologise."

Sir Francis smiled slowly, deliberately, and for one tense moment the two men held each other in check. Paul took a step nearer.

"You refuse, sir—you refuse? Then, by God, sir—" he snatched a glass of wine from the table and flung it furiously at the haughty face before him, "take that."

The glass, thick and heavy, struck, its sharp points tearing the pale skin, its ruddy contents staining the white ruffled shirt, then fell to the ground, struck the carved table, shivered and broke. But before it could touch, the tension snapped.

Closing together, the two men grappled and gripped, as so long ago they had done in the inn parlour.

Sobered by the sudden attack, several guests dragged them apart by main force, holding each in spite of his struggles. There was no need. Self-control asserted itself, and shaking himself free, Sir Francis stepped forward, the smouldering rage only apparent in shaking fingers and the sullen glare in his eyes.

"Count Paul, you will give me satisfaction for this insult." There was a quick stir in the group behind. Paul bowed.

"At your pleasure, Sir Francis." He beckoned to the officer so unintentionally the promoter of the quarrel, who, now completely sobered, moved nearer. After a short colloquy, Paul turned.

"Sir Francis, Major Crowley will wait upon any gentleman you may elect as your representative at his convenience. May I suggest that, as we part to-morrow, the sooner this little affair is settled the better for those concerned?"

They faced each other again, and instinctively each guest moved closer. There was something in the atmosphere which told of fierce hatred united to the anger of provocation, something deeper, of longer standing, than a momentary brawl over a lady's name. Sir Francis bowed.

"The sooner the better, for my part. Here—in an hour—when you please."

"Then—" Paul took out his watch, calmly regarding it as it lay in his hand, the bunch of handsome seals dangling from the fob chain, "shall we say at dawn? That is, four hours from now."

"As you please," replied Sir Francis, putting his hand before his face to conceal a well-feigned yawn. "My friend Sir Jasper Vance, and Major Crowley will, no doubt, settle the preliminaries."

Again Paul bowed, and both men turned unconcernedly, as though there had been no break in the evening's amuse-

ment. But all thought of jollity had gone. There was a vague uneasiness in each member of the party, a general inclination to disperse, and within an hour the old grey house lay silent as a grave. Only those four concerned kept watch, and the ceremonious preliminaries being disposed of, Major Crowley and Sir Jasper Vance snatched a couple of hours' sleep.

From outside, the Moon's golden face stared in, grave and solemn. He looked into the stately room where my lord slept —a dreamless, unbroken sleep, the sleep of those who have stifled passion, dulled conscience, and shut themselves out of the living world; into other rooms, where, with the emblems of civilisation thrown from them, men became equal; along dim corridors, where shadows ran swiftly, noiselessly. Black, grey, golden, they passed, and entered through the closed doors. They were the dreams—the dreams, which at night haunt every house. Two doors they passed, for the inmates were not yet ready for them, perhaps one would never more be ready, or perhaps, in his last long sleep, they would be pleasant company, those ghosts of daylight thoughts.

At a table Paul sat writing; there was much to be done in the little time remaining, letters, injunctions, messages. But at last they were finished, all but one, that one so difficult to write.

"Ah, Betty, Betty." He flung his arms across the table, laying his head upon them. "Betty, darling, if I die, who'll look after you?" And in that last solemn hour Paul fell on his knees and prayed as only those pray who touch death's dark mantle. "Shield her, O God. Be with her, guardian angels. Mary, Mother, look down and keep her from harm and the assaults of the devil—from the world and its temptations."

Slightly comforted, he rose, drew paper and ink towards him and wrote—wrote till Church Clock's warning bade him remember the night was passing. The flow of impassioned words, of longing, was finished, practical matters took its

place, the last injunction being the most important. "Even if I live, Betty, there'll be danger. Dearest, I shall have to flee the country if *that* should happen. And in that case, I cannot write direct to you, nor you to me. Dearest, you will write, won't you? Send them to Jerry, and I will do the same. He's so true and steady, and oh, my darling, be careful. Remember, such a little may part us for ever. Only Jerry will have my address. Burn every letter you receive from me, especially this, directly you have read it. For a few weeks I dare not write; it would not be safe. But when the first hue and cry has abated, then I will do so, and every moment I shall be thinking of you. Betty, Betty—don't forget me. Love me, darling, and perhaps, who knows, this trouble may pass. God bless you, my darling."

"Yes, it'll pass—it'll pass," said Church Clock, as he struck four, "as all things pass." The Moon beamed softly and turned his yellow face to the silver fields, the deep dark lane, the deserted cottage. Together they peeped once more into the empty garret, then, with smiling glances, into the little white room of the inn. The Moon's bright rays fell on the narrow bed, on the wealth of red-gold hair tumbling over white pillows, on Betty's small face; a happy smile flitted across it, and the Moon's round visage grew rounder as he smiled back.

"Such happy, happy dreams," he murmured; "will they, too, pass, Church Clock?"

"Yes, they'll pass, they'll pass," ticked Church Clock. "Yet sometimes dreams become realities, and realities, sooner or later, always become dreams."

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE BLACK KNIGHT FOUGHT THE WHITE KNIGHT AND WAS VANQUISHED; AND HOW THE GOOSE-GIRL CRIED FOR THE MOON

THERE was a place where the lane broadened out into a grass-grown circle. Here, in the grey twilight which precedes dawn, came Sir Francis and his second. Close behind him followed Paul and Major Crowley. The surgeons, fetched hurriedly from Channington, were already in their places. All four men wore thick warm cloaks, for the early October morning was chilly.

There was some little time to wait for daylight, and each employed it in giving last messages; letters and more important matters having been previously settled. Then, as the east grew lighter, the seconds met together, conferred, and proceeded to measure the ground, their principals meanwhile divesting themselves of their heavy wraps. Both wore black beneath, closely buttoned. Paul had choice of position, and took that on the right; from thence he could see the chimney stack of the inn, and a gable window which he knew to be Betty's. It gave him confidence, and as he took the pistol from Major Crowley a flutter of excitement seized him. What was this death which lurked near? What was beyond? Oblivion, dreams, or a coming again? In less than fifteen minutes he might know the great secret. On the other hand—he glanced across at Sir Francis. To all appearance he was indifferent; carelessly fingering his weapon, he chatted idly to Sir Jasper. Did he, too, wonder? The dawn lightened, a tree trunk caught his eye, and for the time became the most important thing in the world. Its outline grew more definable;

in a few minutes the first beam of morning would catch its surface. He watched idly, the murmuring voices reached him, then stopped. The seconds withdrew, and Major Crowley spoke.

"There is still time, sir—an apology—" Paul silenced him with as haughty a gesture as that of Sir Francis, and the two gentlemen again consulted. The tree trunk stood free of shadows, the light in the east grew and grew. A shadowy radiance hung, then brightened. Clouds, tipped crimson, drifted backwards; like a curtain the shadows fell away, and glorious from behind, rose the sun. A ruddy glow spread over all, and a golden beam struck the tree trunk. The watching was over, and Paul breathed again.

"Gentlemen, take your places. When I give the word, fire."

The two seconds, watches in hand, compared them, said a few words to each other and stood upright. A hasty adjustment of attire, a glance at the beauty round, then, mechanically, each looked across at his rival, and knew that the hatred of youth, perhaps an older hatred still, was there—also, the spirit of manhood, the glory of killing one's enemy, the courage which comes to all at the last. The seconds drew closer, their pale faces tinged with the crimson of the dawn. Paul lifted his pistol and covered his opponent; Sir Francis did the same. A stir—a sudden clearing of every sense—"Fire!" rang the word, and together the two shots woke the echoes. Myriads of birds roused in their nests, twittering with fear, fluttering the leaves as they rose in sudden flight.

Paul stood silent, the pistol dropped from his hand, gazing at the still form opposite, black like a shadow, on the green grass. The surgeons were stooping over him; their grave faces grew graver as they undid the close coat, and disclosed the white shirt stained crimson as the dawn. Hours seemed to pass, yet he felt nothing—not even awe. The surgeons moved. One rose, and turned to Major Crowley. Paul heard the words, faintly, as from another sphere.

"Get your man away; there's no chance." He knew that

his friend was speaking, speaking in his ear. Long after, the sense of what he said came back.

"Paul, we must go. I've got horses waiting at the bottom of the lane; there's money. Everything else will be sent as soon as possible. Come away, man—to London first, and then to Dover, and by the first boat to France. We're safe there. Jasper Vance will follow when he's got help."

Mechanically Paul hurried down the lane; in five minutes the clatter of hoofs sounded on the high road which cut between the lane and the woods. A ploughman stopped to stare open-mouthed. Major Crowley stooped as he passed, and bade him go to the top of the lane.

"There's been an accident, boy, and they want help." But by the time he reached the place it was empty; only the trodden grass, wet in places with something darker than dew, and a torn handkerchief, showed signs of what had happened, and the slow-footed ploughboy stood and gazed in wonderment.

Meanwhile, a small cavalcade carefully wended its way over the fields. A hurdle hastily torn up was piled with cloaks, and the unconscious body laid upon it. Two farm hands, summoned from their work, assisted the doctors, and having done all that could be done, Sir Jasper Vance hastened down the lane, mounted the remaining horse, and rode for dear life Londonwards.

The village inn had before this, on one or two memorable occasions, received death. Mrs. Chubbe, up betimes—it was churning day—caught sight of the dark procession coming towards the back'us door, and stopped, silent for once, in utter amazement. Into the stackyard they came, the hurdle lifted steadily over the stile.

"Lord-a-mussey!" ejaculated the farmer's wife softly, "if 'tain't doctor from Channington, an'—an'—" The red cheeks paled, the hard face softened as she saw what lay upon the stretcher.

"W-who—is—it?" she whispered, and for answer the doctor drew aside the covering cloak, replacing it gently.

"Lord-a-mussey!" reiterated Mrs. Chubbe, crossing herself.

"We must bring him in, Mrs. Chubbe. Get a room ready, not upstairs." She fled, calling on the astonished maids as she passed. The measured tread came after her, and as she quickly piled pillows on the table they carried him into the little inn parlour, closing doors and drawing curtains to shut out prying eyes.

They cut away the closely fitting clothes, covering him with blankets. The doctors shook their heads as they staunched and dressed the wound, Mrs. Chubbe standing by with water and basins. "Is—is—he?" she whispered, and the slight inclination told her the surgeon's answer.

"But, of course, everything must be done," he added, "though—" with a shrug, "it is useless." At last it was over; the doctors stood up, gravely watching the still form, the handsome face, rigid and cold, then turned away, and demanded breakfast.

Mrs. Chubbe mounted guard in the little room. Death was no unfamiliar visitor to her; but this—so sudden—so unforeseen—had given her a shock; moreover, she had a lurking partiality for the dead man; his good looks, fine manners and deferential courtesy, had won upon her. Few women could withstand Francis Crewe when he put forth his blandishments. She stood gazing—gazing—then roused. Her glance fell on a bottle of stimulant used by the doctors and left standing on the mantelshelf. She lifted it to put it in its accustomed place, then, struck by a sudden thought, set it down on the table and looked again at the still form.

"Why not?" she whispered; "he's dead. There can't be no harm in tryin'; doctors ain't always right."

She took the bottle in her hand, weighing chances. Then, with her usual decision, made up her mind. Pouring a few drops into a teaspoon, she gently inserted it between the

clenched teeth, then waited. It trickled out, but nothing daunted, she tried again—again and again. There was a stir outside—the doctors were returning. Hastily hiding the tell-tale spoon she let them in. For a few moments they stood silent, uncovered, then whispered a few directions to the landlady.

"You will stay with him, Mrs. Chubbe, till we return from our sad errand. Count de Cosse must be told, and the earl; he will probably be moved to the Hall later on in the day. We shall spend the night here; doubtless we shall be needed. There will, of course, be an inquiry."

The farmer accompanied them to the entrance. Left alone, his wife barred the door and once more applied herself to her task. Afterwards, she wondered what possessed her to persevere in such an apparently hopeless case. And later still, she solved the enigma—" 'Twas the devil hisself—lookin' after his own."

For an hour she toiled. The sounds of everyday life fell unheeded on her ears. Sally, at the door, got sharper reprimands than usual. "Drat the gals—comin' here just out o' idle curiosity. If they think they're coming in, well, they don't know Martha Chubbe."

Drop by drop the strong liquid fell between the tightly closed teeth. In describing the process, Mrs. Chubbe said that there was a time when—it might have been her fancy—but, somehow, there didn't seem so much difficulty in forcing open the clenched jaw. Fancy or no fancy, it gave her fresh encouragement. And here it may be mentioned that not altogether for Francis Crewe's sake did Mrs. Chubbe take so much trouble. There was always a lurking opinion, hardly owned to, that most things, if left to her, would be improved upon.

It was no fancy. Some instinct bade her hold a mirror to the white lips. A dimness, so slight that it was almost imperceptible, rested a second on the clear surface, then passed. Again she persevered, and an hour went by. But there was no mistake now; Francis Crewe lived, if so faint a spark could

be called life. The farmer tried the door; his wife quickly unbarred it, returning at once to her task.

"Why—why—missis. Whatever be you a-doin' of?" She held up a warning finger and beckoned. Tip-toeing across, he stood by her. She held the mirror again, showing him the surface in silence. Nodding his head, he watched her monotonous task. Even as he stood came the faint flicker of an eyelid.

"Go fetch doctors," whispered his wife, in an excited undertone, and the farmer tip-toed again to the door.

"Who'd ha' thought it?" he murmured; "who iver—could—ha' thought it?"

There was a bustle at the inn; a rushing of excited legs from every field and farm in the neighbourhood. Even midday dinner suffered. The doctors, with angry disapproval at the back of their minds that a layman—*and* a woman—should dare to interfere and resuscitate life, when they had declared it extinct, showed outward delight, and complimented the landlady on her promptitude and patience.

"And now, Mrs. Chubbe," the doctor's tone was light, "having brought our—I should say, your—patient so far, you must continue the treatment. We cannot afford to lose so good a nurse. You've brought back life; whether it will stay is another matter. But he cannot be moved from here; indeed, for a day or so, he must stay just where he is." Mrs. Chubbe curtseyed.

"I'll do my best, sir, for the poor gentleman."

"I'm sure you will," replied the doctor, adding jocosely, "You know what they say about saving a drowning man—eh?"

"What's that, sir?"

"Well, perhaps it doesn't apply in this case. But it is said that a man saved from the sea will bring trouble upon his rescuer." The landlady smiled grimly.

"'Twon't apply here, sir. There's little harm a gentleman like Sir Francis would do to a poor woman. Besides, in a few

weeks he'll be up an' away, an' forget all we village folk." Her listener shook his head.

"Not yet—not yet. I should not like to say how long you'll have him on your hands—more than a few weeks. But you'll be at no loss, mistress; Sir Francis is a wealthy man."

"Nay, sir, I'm not afeard o' that. He's always been generous an' free wi' his money."

And Betty—upstairs in the little white chamber, oblivious of cold, of bustle below, of everything save her own thoughts—sat on and on. Paul's letter, delivered into her hands by his own man, lay on her lap, and the dark eyes, soft and grave now by turns, looked thoughtfully into vacancy or rested on the familiar handwriting.

She had hardly grasped its meaning. That Paul wrote it before fighting Sir Francis Crewe she understood. She had heard that gentlemen sometimes fought each other. She knew, too, that it was about some London lady—that much had trickled through in gossip; Paul had not mentioned it—and that he had killed his opponent, and had had to flee the country. But—and here was the troubling wonder—who was the lady? Hitherto she had thought of Paul's love as hers only. Yet, to fight and kill a man for a lady's sake must mean that he loved her. It is true that every line of the letter breathed passionate devotion, but Betty's vain little heart wanted more than words. No one had ever fought for her, and the childish mind built up visions of herself as a grand lady, with fine lovers like—like that dead man below, worshipping her very footprints, ready to fight, if necessary to die for her. And with the picture came thoughts of Sir Francis. His dark eyes, which gazed at hers so boldly, that even at the remembrance her cheeks burned fiercely. His elegant bearing, the deferential manner of listening to her chatter, and the way in which, only two days ago—she blushed hotly again—he had lifted her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

She glanced down at the small hands and made an impatient movement. Ladies' hands were white; in spite of all she could do, hers were slightly coarsened by work and exposure. She glanced again at the letter. Poor Paul, a knight errant indeed. Her thoughts went back—back to childhood. Little things came to her memory, small kindnesses, gifts, shieldings from blame, and Betty knew that in each case she had been the culprit.

Suddenly came the thought of the quarrel in the inn parlour. How Paul had protected her; and yet, had she really needed protection? A kiss snatched from a child, what was it? She had been silly to make such a fuss. Still, Paul was good, and a few tears fell as she thought of him banished to a distant country. Betty's ideas of law were vague. His father and the count no doubt could manage things so that he would come back soon, and then she would ask him about the London lady. Meanwhile, she would write to him whenever she wrote to Jerry. With these comforting thoughts she rose, bathed her eyes in cool water, and went downstairs. Here, indeed, was news. Sir Francis lived—thanks to her aunt.

It was two days before there was any real improvement. Mrs. Chubbe spent them in the inn parlour, doors barred to all save her husband and the doctors; even to the earl, who came himself to inquire. She emerged occasionally, it is true, "as cross as the sticks," Sally was heard to observe, gave sharp orders, scolded right and left, and disappeared again. In a week the best chamber of the inn was prepared—the crimson hangings of the great bedstead taken down, shaken and replaced, the best sheets, spun by the farmer's mother and only used on state occasions, brought from the lavender-scented press, the knitted counterpane—a wonderful thing of flowers and leaves, and heavily knotted fringe—laid on top; fires lit, windows closed, and the bright copper warming-pan filled with clear embers and moved up and down in the bed, then taken out, as, with gentle hands, and whispered directions from Mrs.

Chubbe, the farmer and doctors lifted the sick man from his impromptu resting place to the comfortable chamber above, and laid him between the sweet-smelling linen.

From that time the change was marked; yet weeks went by before the danger was entirely past. A day came at last when he was allowed to leave the bed for a short time in the day. Mrs. Chubbe relaxed her efforts, even allowing a village woman to share the nursing, and appeared in the house pale and tired, but triumphant, her tongue, after its complete rest, going faster than ever.

"Did'st ever see the like?" she complained bitterly to the farmer; "turn your back for a few days, and they're off, an' the work left, an' the place all o' a muck. There's dirt here, an' dust there—an' Betty's as bad—Dck—dck—to think that Sally, who's been wi' me nigh upon ten years, couldn't ha' remembered my ways, an' made the puddings an' mincemeat. There'll be Christmas here, an' no Christmas fare, an' you'll be the first, master, to scold if there ain't no Christmas pudding."

"Well, well, missis," said the farmer soothingly. "Set the wenches to it at once, an' if needs be, get a hand from the village."

"Nay, that I never will." Mrs. Chubbe's face and voice were rigid. "I never have had help in, and it shan't be said that Martha Chubbe's gettin' old and can't do what she has done."

Somehow things got finished; the kitchen once more satisfied the keen eye of its mistress, who, having set the wheels of the household running smoothly, had time to look further afield, and made the discovery that Betty was moping.

"Misses the young count, I'll be bound," she told herself. "Well, well, he'll be back in a few months now the danger's over."

It was true, but perhaps Mrs. Chubbe's vision was blurred by personal wishes. Life was very dull to Betty. She sadly missed the company, the gaiety and commotion which had hung

over the village before the departure of my lord's guests. More than that, too, was the miss of Sir Francis Crewe's visits, the timing of them to avoid Paul's, and the delightful excitement of two admirers.

She wished Paul would come back, that she could go to him, that Sir Francis would get well enough to come downstairs and talk to her—anything, to break the dull monotony. And to crown Betty's discontent, came a letter from Lady Mary telling her that she was to leave the convent in January, to spend the year with her father in London.

"But, Betty dear," she wrote, "I have no wish to enter the gay world. Every day I shall count as lost from the beautiful life before me. You know how peaceful the convent is. Oh, Betty, I can hardly be grateful enough to my father for letting me devote my life to religion. The time will be one long dream of holy peace. I am frightened when I think of the wickedness outside, and that for a time I must see something of it. I wish my father would let me go to Cloudesley, to my aunts; I know they want to have me, but he refuses, and my obedience is to him. So, dear Betty, unless I come on a visit, I shall not see you. But you will write to me, won't you, and I'll tell you all about my life in London." Betty read it through, then sighed and beat her little foot impatiently.

"Why aren't things fairly divided?" she cried angrily. "Why can't my lady stay in the convent and I take her place? It's a shame—a shame."

But thus is life—a longing for the unattainable, and every man thinks his pack heavier than his neighbour's.

Paul's letter came at length. He was moving restlessly from one place to another and the good news had not yet reached him. Betty, in her discontent, harboured feelings of resentment against everyone. Why could not Paul have told her the reason of the quarrel? Why did he not trust her with his address? Why this and why that, till never a blacker world was made than that in which she lived. Too much in awe of her aunt to show temper, she did her work as usual,

only the sparkling charm was gone, and a cheerless apathy characterised every movement. Hence Mrs. Chubbe's term, moping.

Towards Christmas the atmosphere cleared. Bright, frosty mornings, busy preparations, the mysteries of Christmas gifts, are bound to have an effect even on older people; how much more on a young careless nature. Once more Betty's voice carolled out, the gay smile came back, and hope whispered promises of delights to come. Moreover, Sir Francis was to eat his Christmas dinner downstairs. Mrs. Chubbe, looking upon him much as a hen looks upon its offspring, metaphorically speaking, gathered him under her wing, shielding from inquisitive eyes, and prepared the inn parlour for his reception. Betty and Sally, assisted by the farmer, decked the great kitchen with boughs of evergreen and scarlet-berried holly; the gnarled apple tree in the orchard was stripped of its mistletoe, which, hung on the huge beam running across the ceiling, would be the chief feature of the evening.

Betty pondered in her mind, as they passed from kitchen to passages, decking bare walls and corners, to the parlour, which was to be a bower of Christmas greenery, whether it would be an impertinence to hang a second bunch. Sally solved the difficulty by the deed.

"Poor young man," she said, tying up the stiff sprigs, "there won't be much to pleasure him; no grand folk, nor fine ladies. But I'll warrant he won't taste a better turkey'n the missis's, no, not in all London town. An' he wouldn't find a bonnier lass for kissin' than you, Miss Betty, I'll be bound. Though, for sure, I'd rather be kissed by our Dickon than him. I dunna care for thin cheeks an' black eyes."

Betty coloured at the girl's remarks, but said nothing; mistletoe is suggestive, even if such things have never been thought of before. When it came to the critical moment, when, with much ceremony and deference the farmer and Dickon arrived to carry their guest downstairs, Sir Francis took matters into his own hands. A casual word acquainted

him with his destination, and a flat refusal followed. He would join the family dinner party in the kitchen, or stay upstairs, and listening to the merriment below, mope his heart out.

In vain Mrs. Chubbe—flattered, no doubt, yet, to use her own expression, "flummuxed"—protested, urging the loss of dignity, the bad effect of excitement. He would hear nothing. A compromise was made; the chimney corner given over to him, could be screened off if necessary, and a table placed there would allow him to see, or be seen, according to his fancy. In fact, it would take the place of the dais of years gone by. At the farm meals, lingered, unknowingly, the custom of the salt; the household sitting below the break of tables, the family above.

Even to the satiated sight of a townsman the farm kitchen presented a picture of warmth, comfort, even beauty, to those who saw with right eyes. The fireplace, piled with logs half way up the great chimney, flared and roared a cheery welcome; not yet had it settled to a steady glow. Brasses, copper, silver, gleamed and sparkled, red bricks, crimson curtains and cushions gave a ruddy tint, oaken beams glimmered dully, and, seen through the casement windows, were trees and fields, and woods white with snow, glittering with frost as the pale mid-day sun caught them.

Mrs. Chubbe had donned her best black silk gown; the bright steel of the carving knife, wielded skilfully by the farmer, reflected the scarlet of his waistcoat, the ruddy roundness of his jovial face. Maids and men curtseyed and scraped as they entered, shy and awkward in the consciousness of best clothes and the presence of the "quality."

To Sir Francis the scene was new, and therefore interesting. From his corner he surveyed it critically, as he would the setting of some scene. His quick eye caught the sound of light footsteps on the steep wooden stairs which ran up behind the kitchen. He heard the door in the wall behind the projecting chimney corner open and shut. More curtsey-

ing from the maids, shuffling pulls of the forelock from the men, and Betty tripped airily in, Betty in her maroon merino frock, made like my Lady Mary's own, with low cut bodice and short sleeves, displaying the white arms and neck, shapely, though as yet lacking the roundness which comes with maturity. The red-gold curls were piled high, here and there escaping in kinks and ringlets, curling and clustering over small ears and white forehead. She wore no ornament, except the gold buckle, Paul's gift, and a small brooch, teased out of her aunt in a weak moment.

No longer was the room a picture. It was alive with vivid life—life which drew him in, making him part of it. The steaming turkey, the great sirloin, was real, he would share it. If he had only been well enough, he fancied himself taking part in the evening's jollities; kissing Sally and Nancy —perhaps Mrs. Chubbe, perhaps—a thrill ran through him as his eyes turned to Betty; to the crimson, smiling lips, the soft white neck, and he let his thoughts wander in dreams.

The ice thawed as dinner proceeded. With healths to the master, the mistress, and young miss, men and maids found tongue. But when all was cleared away, the hearth swept, the fire made up, and the kettle hung for tea, the farmer and his own family gathered round, with many apologies to their guest, and a certain stiffness, which Francis Crewe, putting forth all his powers, dispersed in a short time. The farmer, in the opposite corner, smoked vigorously, his wife, shorn of her everyday occupations, lacking even the comfort of knitting, dozed off. Presently the farmer laid down his pipe, and again apologizing, departed for the usual Sunday afternoon stroll round barns and stackyards.

Betty, on a low stool, her open book on her knee, stared dreamily into the glowing fire, conscious of the dark eyes gazing at her with an expression not altogether new—something which made her heart thrill and beat wildly, and the hot blush come and go till her eyes smarted with the fire from her cheeks. He watched it rise, from snowy shoulders, up, up,

flushing the fair neck, the pale cheeks rosy, tipping tiny ears, higher, till it met and vanished beneath red-gold curls. The look deepened—ardent, passionate. There was a surging in Betty's ears, her heart beat so loudly that she felt sure her aunt would hear it. Through it all she could hear every sound, Mrs. Chubbe's deep respirations, the crackle of the fire, the kettle singing, even his quick breath coming and going. It was painful, yet a pain which she would not have exchanged for any pleasure.

When at last Mrs. Chubbe roused, and the bustle of the day began again, she slipped away to her room to bathe her hot face and still the restless beating of every pulse. Francis Crewe smiled as he followed the light figure; the tedium of illness became no longer tedium. To make love was second nature; he foresaw an easy victory. But beneath the passion of a love triumph lay a deeper passion still, the all absorbing one of hatred. Things were shaping themselves to his hand.

Convalescence came quickly. He was strong, none but an exceptional constitution could have recovered at all, the doctors said. But there were weeks before he would be his own man again. The inn parlour was turned over to him, yet more often he found his way to the kitchen, sitting quietly in the chimney corner, watching the busy household go its way, meeting the glance of Betty's bright eyes, every now and then touching her hands as she brought him a cup of beef tea, eggs, milk, or one of the numerous dainties concocted by her aunt under the name of kitchen physic. For Mrs. Chubbe, having taken matters into her own hands, had no intention of turning back, her one endeavour being to get her patient into such a condition as to cap every previous condition. For each pound he put on his hostess would make it two. And Sir Francis acquiesced laughingly, refusing even my lord's pressing invitation to stay at the Hall.

"No, no, Mrs. Chubbe," he said, "you've begun the job, you must finish it." And, being agreeable to all concerned, things went on as usual.

But not for all. To restless Betty, longing for excitement, experience, life's tide was flowing swiftly. There was danger in the smoothly rolling flood, subtle, unguessed-of depths. Stolen moments of bliss, when he could let his ardent glance run riot, and the blushes might come and go with no fear of watching eyes. Long silences in the afternoons, when the women sewed, and Betty's fingers grew hot and sticky with the knowledge of his presence.

Ah, danger lurked close, and Pan's music, beneath its airy lightness, had a note of menace, of warning. Betty, in her lightheartedness, looked not beyond the passing hour, nor thought of the end, yet the question lay at the back of her mind, "Who was the lady for whom Paul fought?" One day, she told herself, she would ask Sir Francis; he, of course, would know.

In those winter days, when life means stagnation for older folk, and even young ones need an outside stimulus, Sir Francis built a castle. Not the airy, glistening fabric of dreams, rather a fortress of massive walls, of dreary dungeons, of chains and misery. Day by day it rose, blacker, gloomier, a very citadel of woe; only to its creator was it a thing of beauty, for a warped soul sees beauty where is naught but hideousness.

The days tripped lightly by. Betty's good intentions told her to write to Paul, also that it was time Jerry had a letter. But the winter days were short and fully occupied, and it was not until January that she brought herself to write. The following day, with the thought of Paul new upon her, she found the opportunity she sought.

"Missis," the landlord's face appeared round the door, "here's tinker. There's them pans you want mendin', ain't there?" Mrs. Chubbe started up, dropping her work.

"Ah, so he's come at last. I thought maybe he'd dropped into a fortune, an' given up the tinkerin' "—this by way of sarcasm. "Sally, bring them saucepans, an' the shovel you broke last week; we'll see if 't can be mended. An' p'raps

he's got some o' they tin cutters. There's a sight o' things we be needin' of."

She bustled out. Betty, certain of an hour's absence, led the conversation to my ladies, from thence to the Hall, and backwards to the company in the autumn. Sir Francis answered smiling, yet slightly puzzled; he had not yet found the motive. When he did, his heart gave a leap; it was the finishing touch to his castle, the corner stone for which he had been searching. Henceforth he saw a solidity hitherto wanting.

"Isn't it very exciting to fight a duel?" asked artless Betty, stitching vigorously at a new shirt for her uncle.

"Very," replied Sir Francis, smiling at her.

"And doesn't it hurt very much to be shot?"

"No. In fact, it doesn't hurt at all. It's the coming to life again which hurts most."

"Oh!" A long pause. Betty's needle clicked on the thimble; presently she went on, "It's very silly to fight each other, I think."

"It's custom, you know," he answered, still wondering; "and then it depends a great deal on the cause."

Betty raised her eyes, suddenly interested, then dropped them again.

"The cause—oh, yes, of course." He watched her silently, light gradually dawning.

"What was the cause this time?" she asked at length, wondering greatly at her daring, and Sir Francis understood.

"Well," he began slowly, still watching the bent face, "you know, quarrels between gentlemen generally mean one of two things, cheating at cards, or, an insult to a lady."

"And?" queried Betty eagerly. The work dropped, she had forgotten her mask. Again the listener smiled.

"And, in this case, it was the second cause."

"A lady?" He inclined his head. Betty's eyes dropped; she picked up her work again.

"And—w-who—was—the lady?" she asked timidly. Sir Francis shook his head at her and hesitated.

"The lady? That's rather like telling tales out of school, isn't it, Miss Betty?" The scarlet lips pouted gently, the red-gold head turned saucily.

"I'm sure Paul wouldn't mind me knowing; I'll ask him next time I write, if you won't tell me." Again he hesitated, feeling his way.

"There's not much to tell. There was a health drunk, and a dispute, something about a London lady, I believe. Indeed, I hardly know what it was, only Count Paul took the matter up—and—"

"But who was it? What was her name?" demanded Betty.

"Well, if you persist in knowing, her name is Louise da Silva." Betty was silent, counting threads—three forwards—three back again. She lifted the work and slowly contemplated it, her whole mind apparently absorbed. Not till she had settled to it again did she speak.

"What a pretty name, Louise da Silva. Does Paul know her well?"

"Very well indeed, I believe." Again he smiled.

"You must know a person very well to fight for her."

"Indeed you must." Again the twisting and turning of the work, again a silence.

"Is she—young?"

"I believe so—quite young."

"And—and—is she—beautiful?" He laughed out.

"Why, yes, Miss Betty, very beautiful. Men don't fight for old women, nor ugly ones."

"Don't they?" Something seemed to hurt, like a prick at her heart. A question trembled on her lips, half whispered it came.

"Do—men—love—the ladies—they—fight for?" He leaned forward, bending his handsome face nearer, with an amused expression.

"Do you think we'd fight for anything which we didn't

value, Betty? Men generally want what they fight for."

Her face was low; she stabbed her needle absently into the linen before her, in and out, in and out. He stooped nearer to catch the next words.

"Did—Paul?" Unconsciously his voice dropped to a whisper, he laid his hand on hers, closing over the little fingers.

"Betty, Paul is like most other men. You know, don't you, 'Men were deceivers ever—to one thing constant never.'" Then, in a graver tone, "Let him have his fling now; his wings will soon be clipped," he added mysteriously.

"How, what do you mean?" Betty looked up, startled; the close grasp tightened.

"Didn't you know? Men in Paul's position can't do quite as they like; they must marry for worldly reasons. Paul's wife is chosen. When he returns from abroad, which he can do now, he will settle down, no doubt."

"And then—will he—forget—the other lady?"

"Perhaps." There was a note in the voice, a look in the eye so close to hers which made Betty flush scarlet, and, drawing her hand away, hurriedly picked up her work again.

Sir Francis leaned back, well satisfied to let the seed sown grow without further help. The subject was dropped, and the shirt progressed rapidly. The crimson died from her face; she was scarcely conscious of Sir Francis' presence; while he, versed in that dangerous lore, the knowledge of women, understood, and realised for the first time, that with a little careful play, the cards were his and the game won.

CHAPTER V

A BARGAIN WITH TOBY

ALTHOUGH not an unfrequent occurrence, a duel between two men of high standing—the cause, a lady's name—was of sufficient importance to make town-talk for at least nine days. Toby, sorting papers in the quiet of the October afternoon, was startled by the clatter of horse's hoofs on the paved stones of the square. Before he could reach the door Paul entered, and Toby held up his hands in dismay at the travel-stained garments, the worn look in his face. He pushed him away gently, yet decisively.

"Don't stop me, Toby; I want Jerry. See to my horse, there's a good fellow." He brushed hastily past him, taking the broad staircase in two or three leaps, and leaving Toby bewildered, but clear as to the necessity for food and an impromptu rub down for the panting, foam-flecked animal outside.

"Jer—dear old fellow—don't talk, just listen." For Jerry, startled at the sudden appearance of his friend, would have greeted him with questions and offers of assistance. Hurriedly Paul poured out the story, omitting nothing but Betty's name.

"It was a lady, Jerry—I can tell you nothing more; I hope that others will feel the same about it. I think they will; they are men of honour, and he—Jerry, I've blood upon my hands. It was a righteous cause, but the fact remains, I'm a murderer. Oh, Jerry, Jerry." For a short moment he clasped his hands before his eyes, as though to shut out remembrance. Then, dropping them, he seized Jerry's and began again.

"There will be letters. I dare not let my address be known; I do not even know it myself yet. Jerry, will you send on any I enclose to their right destination, and any that come for me? I will send to you directly I get safely there. My father, you'll send his on, won't you? and—and—there'll be others; Betty—and—and—oh, you'll know what to do. And I can trust you, dear old fellow, can't I?"

Jerry had no words; he gripped the slender fingers together and nodded his head.

"Some day it'll come right. They won't search for me always; and then I shall come back, and we'll be happy again. Good-bye. I must go; they're waiting for me, and there's no time to spare. Good-bye, Jer, old fellow—dear old fellow."

"Good-bye, Paul, dear old Paul, good-bye; and here's to your coming again."

They shook hands again and again, with thoughts too deep for words. Jerry accompanied him to the door. There was a quick greeting and good-bye to Reuben, a hearty shake of Toby's hand; then, leaping on his horse, now rested and fed and impatient to be off, he clattered across the stones, turned the corner, and with a wave of his hand, was gone.

The two young men re-entered the house, where Reuben, who had his share of curiosity, awaited explanations. Jerry gave them slowly, falteringly; his hearers listened, Toby silently, the Jew breaking in with ejaculations.

"And so he is dead, this young man," he said thoughtfully, when Jerry stopped. "I did not like him, but it is a terrible thing to be hurried out of life in health and strength, and the hey-day of youth. Ach, yes."

Later a knock came at Jerry's door, and Toby entered.

"I want to ask you, Jerry," he begun hurriedly, "whether you are sure? I mean—did your friend say—if Sir Francis is really—dead?"

"Paul said so, yes," replied Jerry, surprised.

"You're sure, quite sure?" queried Toby, still in that curious anxious whisper.

"Yes, quite sure, Toby. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason; I only wondered."

So did Jerry, and more still when supper time came without Toby. It was nine o'clock when he returned, making some hurried excuse about an errand. The Jew gave him a sharp glance; his shaking hands and white face, together with a restless absent-mindedness unlike his usual cheery briskness, gave the impression of drink; yet something else contradicted it.

Ill news travels apace, so do good tidings. The story of the duel had hardly reached the ears of an intimate circle, when, hard on its heels, came a tale of the marvellous recovery of one of the principles. The tale grew to certainty; in the hall nothing else was talked of. Rumours flitted about, taking fantastic shapes. The cause? A quarrel at cards, a lady—what lady? Names flew openly, others were whispered, but nothing definite was known except that recovery would be long and tedious; that, it was practically certain, was a foregone conclusion; a man is not raised from the dead to be thrust back into, a wit suggested, "hell"; and then, thrashed out, sucked dry, the duel was thrust into the dust bin of forgotten things. An elopement, a failure, a political crisis, took its place, and only a shadow remained of a once flourishing incident.

The slender, elegant figure vanished from the idle crowd of loungers in the hall. Was it that which made Toby's face regain its round cheeriness? It seemed to Jerry that never before had such lightheartedness dwelt in the old house. Laughter, mirth, airy talk were there, and Toby's song echoed constantly.

> Begone, Dull Care; I prithee, bego-on from me;
> Begone, Dull Care; too long hast thou tarried with me.
> Long time it is since thou cam'st here,
> And fa-in would'st thou me ki-ill;
> But i'faith, Dull Care, thou never shalt ha-ave thy will.

The work, too, went by magic. A few commissions came along; small in themselves, but heralds of greater things, and Jerry's castle began to grow. Not quickly, it is true; something was lacking, something which made perfection impossible. No sooner was it complete than he pulled it down. He knew the reason; he knew that, within the rough stone or marble dwelt life, only waiting the master's hand to chisel and cut, till it burst its bonds asunder, and stood free—perfect—glorious. So the ideal lay buried in the future; destiny's chisel must do its work. Sooner or later it would emerge; some day the castle would rise, tower-capped, rosy-hued, glittering in its beauty. So, with that end in view, he worked steadily on. And the ancient house hummed with busy work and song; yet Jerry, remembering other times, knew that it is wisdom to be happy while you may. Shadow follows sunshine, comedy is only tragedy in disguise, and mirth turns to tears, by Nature's laws.

There was no news of the Pan or other pieces of sculpture. Reuben failed to hear of them, in spite of every endeavour, and after many disappointments, Jerry grew to think that they had gone abroad, perhaps to some far-off country, where even the Jew had no influence. He had not given up the hope of finding them—no, indeed; later, when he could rest from work and had won the golden key of liberty, he would search the world for them. Till then, patience.

A little incident upset the even monotony of his days. In his night walks, either with Reuben or alone, he looked for Hester—that he would meet her he felt sure, and by night; for some reason a daylight encounter never entered his mind.

It came one cold October night, two days after Paul's flying visit. Going along the Strand the dark figure flitted across his path, and down a zigzag flight of steps towards the river. He followed quickly; the woman slackened her pace, finally coming to a standstill by an old boat, moored high on the muddy, dirty beach.

"Hester."

He spoke gently, not wishing to alarm her, but she was gazing across the flowing water, wholly absorbed in her own thoughts. Strange thoughts, they seemed to be. He watched her face. There was something new in it; something which made its former beauty fade beside a greater. The face was thinner, and the straight, regular features were sharply cut, as by a chisel. The dark, liquid eyes too, were softer than of yore, but it was not that which enhanced the beauty; it was the look which comes from experience of life, and which, though he knew it not, was growing even on Jerry's face.

"Hester." This time he touched her gently. She started, then turned quietly, her eyes lighting up.

"Jerry; why, it's little Jerry." He took her hand in his.

"Hester, why are you here, alone, so late?" She laughed.

"I'm used to being alone. But don't talk of me. Come, let us walk, and tell me how you came here, and what you are doing." They turned away from the river and, crossing the Strand, sought the more secluded streets which led towards the country. She listened silently as he told her the story, from the widow's death to the time of his departure.

"And so you're living with Reuben Gade," she said; then repeated slowly and meditatively, "Reuben Gade—pawnbroker," adding with a mirthless laugh, "Don't be surprised, Jerry, if you see me creep in some night, under the golden balls, through the little door, where poor folk go."

"But you're not poor, Hester?" He glanced curiously down, and wondered. The wind blew the black cloak away, and the sheen of silken stuff showed beneath. She gathered it close, and the rings on her fingers flashed like the river under the noonday sun.

"No." Again the hard laugh. "I'm not poor, I'm rich—rich in money, in beauty, in health, in all the world calls good. I'm rich too, Jerry," she caught his arm, and laughed low, "in love, in happiness; at least," the laugh died away; she looked up into the clear sky above, "I think so. But it

will pass. Ah, God—" she sighed wearily, "it will pass. Such happiness does not last."

"Nonsense, Hester, happiness lasts." She shook her head, and he changed the subject.

"Tell me about yourself. Where do you live?"

She turned her face to his, and laughed again wildly. "Where do I live? Anywhere. Here to-day, there to-morrow." He looked down gravely, not understanding.

"And where is—he?"

"He?" For a moment she seemed surprised.

"Yes. He—the minister—Mr.—"

She stopped him with a touch and a long-drawn breath. There was an expression in her face which recalled the widow.

"Hester, does he ill-treat you?" he asked sternly.

"Ill-treat me?" She lifted her head proudly. "He would not dare. No, Jerry." There was a scorn in her tone, the scarlet lips curled bitterly. "I think my voice would call him from the grave. But," the words came lightly now, "a woman tires of adoration. I left him, long ago."

"Hester!" There was reproof in Jerry's tone, yet somehow he could not bring himself to blame her. "Where is he now?" he asked presently. She shook her head slowly, then suddenly caught his arm and looked into his face with an expression of fear.

"I don't know. Oh, Jerry, I wish I did. He was mad, I think; he used to frighten me. And he was jealous if I spoke or looked at anyone else. At such times, oh, Jerry," a shiver ran through her—she clung to him, "he was terrible. Like something horrible let loose. He went away, I think, and for a time I was free. But lately, just lately, I've a feeling that he is back in London; that," her voice dropped to a whisper, and she glanced fearfully round, "that he is near me—watching. Jerry, if he finds me, and knows my happiness—" the words died on her lips, but he understood what she did not dare to put into words, and they walked on in silence. Presently she spoke again.

"Jerry, dear, I'm so glad you've seen me and spoken to me, but you must never do it again. If you see me, take no notice; go on your way."

"Why do you say such a thing, Hester? You know I couldn't do that."

"But you must, Jerry," she cried vehemently. "You must. If—if—what I feel—is true; if—he sees me with you—why, there is danger—danger to you and to me." She shivered again. He drew her arm through his protectingly.

"You are fanciful, Hester. No one would dare to hurt you." She smiled wearily.

"Ah, Jerry, you don't know the world. It is an easy thing to disappear in London. A woman is not missed; not one like me," she added under her breath.

"What do you mean, Hester?" he asked, almost angrily.

"I mean—" she broke off; then, "Jerry, if you should ever think of me, if, in your happy, busy life, you should ever give a thought to one who knew happiness only for such a short time, if you would find my grave, why then, Jerry, come to the river, come to the dark arches, the steps leading to it, the deserted beaches and wharves, where things like me find their last resting-place." He turned angrily upon her.

"Hester, you're tired; you don't know what you are saying. We'll turn homewards." They retraced their steps. As they neared the Strand she stopped.

"Leave me now, Jerry. Only first give me your promise." He shook his head, but she stood her ground, and at last, seeing that she really meant it, he gave a reluctant consent, inwardly determining to find a way to break it. She breathed a sigh of relief.

"But I shall see you home, Hester, now," he said. Again she refused.

"I tell you, Jerry, I have no home. Where I go, you cannot come." Then laughing, "Say good-bye, like the good, obedient boy you always were." Again he remonstrated, argued, but she was firm.

"Good-bye, Jerry," she cried at length, breaking from him. He would have caught her, but she evaded him, and, slipping across the road, was lost in the darkness.

He went home thoughtfully, pondering over another of London's mysteries. Hester Dyke was nothing to him; but her strange appearance, the handsome dress and jewels, told their own tale. It troubled him at times, though he knew he could do nothing.

Paul's letters came thick and fast; there were enclosures for several people, but the ones for Betty far exceeded even those addressed to the count. Bits of news trickled through from Cloudesley, for the most part idle gossip. Sir Francis was better; he had been moved from the Hall; he was to be brought to London. The count was ill with trouble and suspense, he had gone to join his son, which last proved to be true. Grey Towers was shut up for an indefinite period, and, after learning Paul's whereabouts, Count de Cosse had taken the first packet across and hastened to him.

Life was very sweet to several people that winter. To Jerry, working and building; apparently to Toby, working and singing; to Reuben, because others were happy. And down in little Cloudesley it was sweet with a more dangerous sweetness.

Day by day Francis Crewe added another stone to his fortress, another link in the chain, and Betty, like a little bird lured by the fascination of a brilliant snake, drew nearer the silken web spun to catch beautiful things of this world, and turn them to those evil shapes and forms which lurk by night in the narrow streets and byways of London city.

Christmas came and went. The old year died and the new was born—a lusty crowing child with a silver spoon in its mouth—a new year to be remembered till time is no more, for it was to be marked by the accession of a girl queen, a princess, a good fairy.

It was a month old when Francis made his first move which was to end in checkmate to his enemy. For some time after

Paul's departure, Jerry had pondered vaguely over the little scene which he had witnessed. Other things had pushed it into the background. Now something happened which brought it vividly to his mind.

The narrow street had grown to have as great a fascination for him by night as the hall had by day, with this difference. Tragedy stalked in the flickering lamplight, while romance followed like a shadow; in the morning, romance flaunted in brilliant garments, while tragedy lay low, like a shadow at noonday, only waiting for the sun's decline to give it dimensions.

At his window, reading and thinking, Jerry would often linger till late into the night. Sitting thus one evening, his thoughts intent on nothing more serious than whether he should go downstairs and have a chat with Reuben before retiring to rest, he was suddenly roused by an indefinable feeling that the street was not empty. He rose, put out the lamp, and screening himself behind a curtain, watched. Across the road, swiftly, silently, came the figure of a woman. He knew it again; stealthily it came, till it stood beneath the golden balls; from under its black draperies a hand was lifted, and a muffled tapping fell on his ears. Quickly, without knowing why, and with no intention of spying, he pushed open a window. Almost as he did so, the door of the boarded wing opened, a short colloquy followed, then a deep groan, which cut him to the heart as he listened. The door closed silently; the figure flitted back, disappearing into the shadow of a deep porch opposite. Toby's footsteps sounded outside his door, and Toby himself appeared with the old look of ghastly fear.

He closed the door securely, then caught him with trembling fingers by the lapels of his coat.

"Jerry," he whispered, "you're my friend, I know; you're so strong and trustworthy. I must go out, he's sent for me. Will you watch and let me in, so that Reuben doesn't know? I would not have him know, for—not for all I could see. I may be all night, but I shall come back. Will you?"

From his own great height, Jerry looked down into the pleading blue eyes, the round face, made for cheery good humour, now drawn and blanched with fear. He put his hands on Toby's shoulders.

"Of course I'll wait and let you in," he answered cheerfully. "But, Toby," his voice grew grave, "can't you tell me what is troubling you? I might be able to help."

"No—no—I can't—I can't." He drew himself away, wiping the perspiration, which broke in great beads, from his face. "Oh, Jerry, I wish I could—perhaps—some day."

Jerry watched him with almost tender solicitude. He knew fear, though not fear such as this. Secrets had been his to hold, though not such as this.

Toby pulled himself together, wrung Jerry's hand, and hurried off. A minute later the door beneath the golden balls opened softly; casting a quick glance round he paused, then began to walk slowly down the street, keeping in the shadow of the wall. He had not gone five paces when, from the porch opposite, the woman with noiseless tread flitted lightly after, overtaking him where the street dissolved into dark spaces. Jerry sighed and dropped the curtain. But outside another shadow moved stealthily from among the shadows, creeping, lurking, appearing and disappearing, till it, too, was lost in the blackness.

Toby and his companion, leaving the square, passed through the narrow streets, finally emerging into the Strand. The shadow followed—now visible in a lamp's pale radiance, now lost in the darkness of blank walls. Out in the busier thoroughfare it found lurking places in doorways, on steps running to the river, in the entrances to foul courts. In and out it went, yet ever keeping those two in sight, westwards, then with a sharp turn to the south, down Whitehall, then westward again. Snow had fallen earlier in the day; in the traffic of the city it had disappeared. Here it lay, and as the moon rose, the stately towers and ancient pinnacles of St. Stephen's and the abbey gleamed white amongst leafless trees. Black

shadows lay on the ground, those of the two hurrying figures making strange, uncouth movements to climb walls or merge together. But the shadow behind, in the blackness where the moon's rays did not penetrate, was but a shadow.

On, on through dull streets, till they came to another square, compared with which the one in the city was but a miniature. Its houses told of their owners; wealth and rank were written on each solid, grave dwelling. Here and there a chariot, with men in livery and powder, awaited its occupants, while behind were glimpses of trim gardens, with great trees, and old walls suggesting sun-kissed peaches and tawny apricots.

On one side, occupying nearly the whole space, stood a mansion with an imposing entrance. Flights of marble steps ran up to a terrace, where massive lions couchant reposed in silent majesty. On the great gate-posts more lions, rampant now, held shields, that all might read the story of the house's inmates.

But not for such visitors was the state entrance. The woman flitted noiselessly down a side alley, and taking a key from the folds of her cloak, unlocked a heavy door, pushed it open, and beckoned to Toby. The shadow behind crept swiftly after, a chink of yellow light fell for one second on a white face, ghastly in its pallor—the door closed, darkness fell, and the shadow crouched amidst its fellows in the blackness of blank walls.

Through paved passages the woman flitted, coming at last to the main hall, a place of spacious arches and pillars. Toby, as he passed, gave an involuntary shiver; the floor of coloured marble might have been a field of battle, so suggestive was the splashing of crimson on the pure whiteness. A staircase of the same, with gilded balustrade, ran upwards, while through a stained glass window, the moon's light threw a purple stain on to the breast of a statue of "Mirth," giving a sinister expression to the laughing radiant figure.

Footmen in gorgeous liveries stood at the entrances, but with a quiet word the woman passed on and pointed to a doorway behind a curtained arch.

"The same room," she whispered. "You know your way." For a moment she waited till he had lifted the velvet hangings, then glided quickly away.

Toby knocked at the heavy door, but receiving no answer, opened it gently and went in. A flood of soft light almost blinded him, the heavy scent of lilies mingled with that of rich food and wine. Hundreds of creamy yellow candles, it seemed to him, gleamed, and were reflected in the glistening damask and polished silver on the table.

A huge log fire leaped and flickered in the fireplace; before it, half hidden by the deep chair in which he reclined, was a slight figure. His napkin was cast on the floor, the decanter at his elbow glowed ruby red like an enchanted crystal. Toby waited, waited, while the golden-faced clock, standing high in a recess, ticked and ticked, then burst into a wild chime and struck twelve. In the silence which followed, a consciousness of another personality must have struck the occupant of the chair; he raised himself slightly, turning his head.

"Toby Dingle!" he exclaimed, in a tone of well feigned surprise. "Why, to be sure, I sent for you. Come, man, sit down, and forgive this seeming lack of courtesy; my illness has caused memory to play sad tricks lately." Toby advanced and stood silently waiting.

"Sit down, sit down," cried the other, impatiently waving to a chair. But he stood still.

"No, thank you, Sir Francis, I prefer to stand."

"Oh, very well, very well," then, with a laugh, "he that will not when he may, you know. However, that's neither here nor there. You got my message?" Toby inclined his head. "Good, I've a trusty messenger, for the present, at least. Toby—trust a woman while she loves—afterwards—" he snapped his fingers, gazed moodily into the fire, then roused, and pushed the decanter towards his guest. Again the offer was declined. Sir Francis gave him a quick glance.

"So, you neither accept my hospitality nor drink my wine.

Well, perhaps later on." He poured out a glass for himself, and in the interval Toby found his voice.

"Sir." The other looked up, put the stopper into the decanter, and leaning back, sipped the wine leisurely, while he listened. Toby went on, gaining courage as he proceeded.

"It is five years now, since—since—" he faltered. Sir Francis smiled grimly.

"Since—shall we speak plainly, Toby? Since you—"

"No, no, sir," he moved forward, as though to check the words, speaking in a hurried undertone. "Don't say it—don't breathe the terrible word. Five years, five years of torture and misery, of pinching and scraping. Ah, sir—what is a sum like that to you? You do not understand that it means my all. But it is over now—over—thank God—thank God."

The breath of relief made the other look up and slightly raise his eyebrows. "Over?" he queried softly.

"Yes, sir—by God's help and your mercy. Sir, I'll never forget your goodness. So long as I live, I'll work for you, I'll do anything for you. If needs be, I would die for you. It's been a hard struggle, but it's done. Had you not sent for me, I would have come directly I knew you were back, and brought it to you. For it's ready—ready—" Ah, the joy in the voice! "Only waiting your acceptance; and you'll give me—the—the—" he turned away, hiding his face, "and then—freedom; freedom from care, such as, I pray God, sir, may never be yours."

The gasping breath, the hurried words, the sadness, the joy, the tale of suffering, might have softened the heart of the marble figure in the hall. Sir Francis sat forward and set the glass on the table, twisting it idly by the stem.

"You have the money, eh?" he said, presently.

"Yes, Sir Francis," replied Toby, with gleeful eagerness.

"Ah—" a silence—then, with a quick smile, "You count much on my generosity?"

"On your generosity, sir, and your promise."

"And my promise—" repeated the baronet, musingly; "which promise I will redeem, but—"

"Sir, oh, sir—" He stepped hastily forward, almost touching the other. Sir Francis waved him back.

"Gently, gently, Toby, my good fellow." Then, daintily fanning the air with a scented handkerchief, "Pah, you bring with you the scent of the Jew, the scent of trade, and cheese, and unpleasant things. However, as I was saying," he paused a moment, tucking the handkerchief into a small pocket, "I will redeem my promise. The—er—document—shall be yours; the money, as you say, is a flea bite. You have saved it—keep it. It will start you," still with the cynical twist of the thin lips, "in business."

Hardly able to believe his ears, Toby would have thrown himself on his knees before his benefactor, but Sir Francis motioned him wearily away.

"My good fellow, spare me heroics. I understand your feelings of gratitude and respect you for them. Nevertheless," he paused, and passed his hand over his face to conceal the uncontrollable sneer evoked by his own words, "as, but a moment ago, you very kindly said if necessity arose you would die for me, I will take you at your word, although," the sneer changed to a laugh—a laugh with a jeering mockery in it, "I do not ask so great a thing; merely a small task, one which will occupy you perhaps a few minutes; a trifle indeed, after your noble professions of gratitude."

Something in the simple words, perhaps in the drawling voice, or the handsome, contemptuous curl of the lips, struck icy cold at Toby's heart. He stood holding the mantelshelf.

"A trifle—" he repeated mechanically.

"I said—a trifle." Like a thin trickle of east wind came the words. "I meant a trifle compared with life, either," again the laugh, "mine, or—yours."

Toby shivered. The hall, with its blood-red splashes, came vividly before him. He put the vision aside and stood straight.

"Anything I can, sir, I will be only too glad to do."

"That's a sensible fellow," cried Sir Francis heartily. "And afterwards, when this little affair—I hardly need tell you, Toby, that it's an *affaire de cœur,* you understand—is settled, which I hope will be soon—say, in a few months."

"A few months?" echoed Toby, questioningly.

"Hardly less, my good fellow; a lady takes her own time, you see. But, as I was saying, when it is settled, I'll make you a present of the five hundred pounds, and also—the—er—the document—you prize so highly."

Toby stood as though petrified. Sir Francis leaned back in the great chair, crossed his legs, and watched him with an amused expression.

"Well," he said, after a long pause, "you agree?"

Toby lifted his eyes, full of a grievous disappointment.

"Sir, you promised—" he stammered falteringly; the baronet checked him:

"Quite so. I promised, and will perform."

"But—but—forgive me, sir—I understood—when I had the money, you would—" The light, easy voice interrupted:

"Then you misunderstood, my man. There was no time limit; I'm not a fool. But now, I give you my word, my written word, if it please you better." Toby shook his head.

"No, sir; I could not hold you to any written promise, without disclosure."

"Quite so; but—" he drew himself forward; the tone was serious now—even the listener felt no mistrust, "I swear, Toby, that on the night she comes here—" He broke off suddenly at a slight sound. "What's that?" he whispered, looking into Toby's terrified face. With a stride, he had the door open. "No, there's no one there," he said, as he came back. "Fancy, no doubt; illness has strange effects. As I was saying, you shall bring her, and that night I will give you the paper you want, and the money."

"I don't want the money, sir—only—the—other."

"And you shall have it, Toby." He rose and put his hands

on the broad shoulders, standing above him. "I swear it, on my honour as a gentleman. Do this for me, and in a few months—before the year is out, you shall be free."

"Free!" A deep, shuddering breath told of the agony beneath. "Well, sir, if it must be, it must. You hold my fate. What is it you would have me do?"

"A trifle, Toby, a trifle; a little sleight of hand; to you—" with a look which turned Toby's blood to water, "simplicity itself; merely to intercept certain letters and bring them to me. Really, too absurdly simple."

"Take a letter—" cried Toby, horrified. "But that—would be—stealing." The baronet shrugged his shoulders.

"Call it what you please; there are worse names. For instance—"

Toby threw up his arms with a muffled cry. "Sir, sir—don't say it; the terrible word. I'll do your bidding."

"Ah—" drawled the baronet, "strange—that a word should have so great an effect." He dropped back into his chair and filled his glass again.

"Where are these letters to be found, sir?" Toby's voice was flat and level, the voice of one who has lost hope.

"Well, the fact is, they are not yet written. But they will be, many of them; and they will be addressed to a certain person, by name Jerry Dell."

"Jerry Dell," cried Toby. "Have pity, he is my friend." The baronet's answer was drawling and slow.

"Yes, that is why I selected you. The less difficulty, the less suspicion. These letters will contain others to various people, mostly of no importance to me. Those addressed to 'Miss Betty Chubbe, Cloudesley,' you will bring to me. You understand?"

Toby hid his face in his hands and groaned. Sir Francis rose, yawning, as though to terminate the interview.

"*All* letters," he repeated emphatically, and with an inexorable decision in his tone. Toby mechanically put on his cloak; the baronet resumed his pleasant manner.

"A glass of wine before you go into the cold? No? Then good-night. Remember the bargain. I shall not forget my part. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Toby turned from the room as from some gilded cage, through the red-flecked hall, into the fresh night air, homewards, where, faithful to his trust, Jerry waited. As he opened the little door, Toby pushed past him quickly. A glance at his face almost caused him to drop the heavy bar. Pinched, haggard, ghastly—it was the face of a stranger.

"Don't touch me, Jerry; don't come near me. I'm lost—lost—damned for ever and ever—oh, my God! my God!"

Jerry caught the half-whispered words as he passed quickly by; he was after him with a bound, catching him before he could go far. In vain Toby struggled, the iron grip held him.

"I don't want to know your secret, Toby," he said, "but you shan't go like this; you're not fit to be left alone." He stopped struggling.

"Jerry, I swear I'll do nothing violent; I promise, I can't afford to die—till—" his voice dropped still lower, "till—I've got it back." With this he let him go, and Toby fled upstairs. Jerry bolted the door and followed; but that night he spent outside Toby's door. Not till the sound of weary, monotonous footsteps had stopped, and the extinguished light told that rest had come, did he leave.

Another vigil was kept that night. In the dark shadow of buttressed walls another shadow mingled—watching—waiting. Sir Francis turned back to the fire as the door closed, sniffing disdainfully, and fanning the air with the perfumed handkerchief. Taking a handful of something from a vase, he threw it on the fire; a pale, scented smoke filled the room, and sighing in a relieved way, he sank back into the chair, lifted a bowl of lilies towards him, and buried his face in them.

Some slight sound caused him to lift his eyes, his face still in the flowers. A woman stepped from behind the massive

screen shutting off a deep window. She dropped her heavy mantle and hood and stood before him, vivid in flaming draperies of scarlet; scarlet, which matched her lips and the rich colour in her cheeks. He set down the jar and leaned back, smiling as he had smiled at Toby.

"Ah, so you were there, were you? I thought as much, when I opened the door."

"And you let me stay?" she cried fiercely. He raised his eyebrows.

"Certainly. Why not? It was easier than to tell you."

"You would have told me?" She moved a step nearer, hanging on his answer.

"Why, of course. It would have been necessary to tell you."

"Yes," she replied bitterly. "It's well to be off with the old love—"

"Quite so," he answered quietly, "when there's a new love to be on with. Like most women," with a shrug, "you rush at conclusions. My love is the same as it has been for two years." Her eyes flashed angrily.

"Why lie to me, Francis, when I heard with my own ears? This girl—this Betty Chubbe—"

Sir Francis rose, rested his arms on the mantelshelf and gazed with a smile of mocking amusement at the handsome, passionate face.

"My dear girl, why put yourself into this rage? Why not ask and receive an explanation?"

"Ask!" She laughed scornfully. "What explanation is possible?"

"This." He stepped close to her, putting his hands on her shoulders; so close, she could feel his breath as it came and went, the beating of his heart, the thrill of something deeper than love; no mere love had ever stirred Francis Crewe in this wise.

"Hester," the hands tightened their hold, "there's a passion

stronger than love—it is hate. This girl is but an instrument; through her my vengeance will fall on him. Do you understand?"

She nodded slowly, looking him through and through with deep eyes. He gave her look for look, then drew her close to him.

"You do not love me, Francis?" she whispered. For answer he bent his head, leaving a long kiss on her neck. With a deep sigh she dropped her head on his shoulder, and lifting her arms, threw them round him with a fierce, passionate embrace.

"Francis, I think sometimes you are a devil in man's guise. But, I love you—ah, God—how I love you."

"Perhaps for that very reason," he laughed. "But my love is yours, Hester, though I tell you candidly, I hate more than I love."

"And I will help you, Francis—my love—my love. Only love me."

The candles burned low in their sconces; the moon waned, and the keen morning air penetrated even the warm, perfumed room. An hour before the wintry dawn, from the dense blackness of the wall a shadow rose from its place, flinging its arms wildly and crying as it ran—

"'Vengeance—vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. I will repay.' Nay, Lord, not thine, but mine—mine. Vengeance, vengeance, on this great city of Babylon, where the Scarlet Woman sits enthroned. Vengeance, on harlots and adulterers, on thy enemies, and mine, O Lord. Vengeance, vengeance!"

Windows were opened here and there as he passed, but London, for the most part, slept the sleep of early morning, and either heard not, or hearing, did not heed.

CHAPTER VI

HOW THE CASTLE OF THE BLACK KNIGHT GREW, AND HOW JERRY FOUND A FAIRY

FROM that day lightheartedness fled the old house near the Strand; the spirit of work, the spirit of mirth followed in her wake. Toby's song was no longer heard. Jerry, stealing from his room night after night, would listen to the restless footsteps; backwards and forwards, to and fro they went, while every now and then a heavy sigh broke the silence. It was echoed by the patient watcher in his troubled sympathy. Beyond that he said nothing, knowing that a forced confidence is worthless. But Toby knew that his burden was shared; there were occasional night excursions when Jerry, waiting up, let him in without questioning, and at those times the anguish at his heart was well nigh uncontrollable.

"Traitor, wicked, perjured traitor!" No name was bad enough.

The letters were not always kept by Sir Francis; indeed, there were many times when, after reading, he would return them to Toby with a command to let them go. He noticed that the occasions grew wider apart; the baronet had his game to play, too sudden a move might awaken suspicion, and to separate the lovers while making love himself, required all his skill. He found too, that Betty, though a country maiden unversed in worldly ways, was by no means lacking in intelligence. The least false move, the smallest slip, and she would scent a lure, and he might whistle for his castle.

Betty too, had her own little game to play. If Paul could make love to two people, why, then, so could others. She dropped little hints in her letters, "Sir Francis had come to

Cloudesley by the coach last night; he was charming, her aunt could hardly say enough in his praise." Ah, Betty, such artless coquetries fall like small winged darts in a usual way, but in the case of great passions they are as poisoned barbs, spreading their venom and contaminating all.

It was these letters which Paul received. His own, which might perhaps have had healing powers, were placed carefully in a locked drawer, alongside of another packet marked "from my Betty," also a document inscribed upon which was Toby's name. There were times when, like some evil thing, Francis Crewe turned to them, gloating and sneering as he read them again and again, making sure that nothing had escaped his notice. There were times, too, when another face bent beside his, a handsome, passionate face, and not to those eyes was revealed a knowledge of the second packet. A new love had come to Francis Crewe, but not for him was the old couplet, "It's well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new." Rather, "It is well to have two strings to your bow."

Paul, in his exile, heard of his opponent well and strong, and would have hurried home, but for the sudden illness of his father. The shock, the unprepared, comfortless journey, had told on a constitution none too robust, and the warm south being recommended, father and son hastened there as soon as the count was able to bear removal. It was a bitter disappointment to Paul, but no suspicion of duplicity entered his head, and though Betty's letters were few and far between, he thought little of it, knowing her careless nature. His own were full of a passionate love and explanations, which were so much waste paper as far as Betty was concerned. It is true that Sir Francis, knowing that letters were received by my ladies, preferred to tell her himself of the count's illness, with a slight uplifting of his black eyebrows at Paul's neglect.

"A trifling indisposition, he would be travelling in a day or two, no doubt," and "the count and his son have left the little village; they are en route for the south; from thence

they go to Florence and Rome. Ah," with a laugh, "Paul is a clever fellow, manages to turn an unpleasant incident to his advantage."

And Betty, missing the letters, angry that news should come from any but Paul, listened, turning a deaf ear to the little voice which whispered, "Paul is true—have patience—wait," and surrendered herself to the pleasant soothing of a heartache. Sir Francis' soft words, his subtle flatteries, the passionate look in his eyes as they followed her, were as balm to a wound. The poisoned honey, dropped by a trained hand, aided by a few apparently careless words, did its work. Paul should see she didn't care, others wanted her if he did not. She knew every movement of Louise da Silva, who, as luck would have it, was fulfilling an engagement in Paris; "spending the winter there," Sir Francis told her, with a sneering laugh, the meaning of which Betty understood.

The baronet held in his hand two trump cards; an opportunity to play them was near at hand.

The witchery of the springtime is a tonic to love-making, and the spring of 1838 surged and boiled, and almost broke its bonds with wild patriotism, loyalty, and passionate romance. Newspapers and periodicals could talk of nothing but the little princess, preparing for a responsibility such as perhaps never before had rested on so fair and young a pair of shoulders. England itself was one pent up cry of emotions, stifled till, with one great burst, they should rend the air on that great day of June. What wonder that a small paragraph in an obscure paper, whose editor was open to a bribe, should pass unnoticed by the great world.

To Betty, already knowing the sickness of heartache, it brought a dull numbing of the pain. The final blow which strikes down love for ever, had fallen. Henceforth, she would be gay and merry, she would never again believe in such poor things as truth and love and faithfulness. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but she did it, and Francis Crewe's admiration redoubled as he watched her play her part.

Not even to him did she reveal the anguish at her heart; not by the flicker of an eyelid, the flutter of a sigh, did she show more than an ordinary interest as she read the words, "We have it on excellent authority that a certain well known lady, Mdlle. L——— d— S—v—, has deserted the French capital in order to follow an equally well known gentleman to his retreat in the south, where, owing to the illness of a relative, he will spend the spring. No doubt the tedium of attendance on a sick room will be much alleviated by the presence of one whose name spells beauty, wit, and charm."

But the other trump card required more delicate handling, and it was with some misgiving that the baronet sent for Toby once more. He received him in a small, oak panelled room at the back of the house, and, even to his callous nature, a change was apparent. The past weeks had done their work, taking the colour from his cheeks, the comfortable roundness from his figure. He brought letters, and as he passed them, Sir Francis noticed that the trembling fingers were thin almost to boniness. The baronet sat in a straight, high-backed chair, and after reading the letters, put them into the steel-bound box, whose lid remained ostentatiously open, showing, besides the letters, another paper. He motioned his visitor to be seated, and Toby obeyed; he could sit at his ease in this every-day room.

"I want your aid, Toby," said the baronet, coming to the point. "This little affair of which we spoke does not progress so rapidly as I could wish. It wants a small push, a fillip, and you, my dear fellow, are the one to give it. It is the last service but one which I shall require from you, that other being to fetch the lady when the time comes."

"And this?" asked Toby, with a dull apathy which even the sight of the paper failed to disperse.

"This? Oh, quite a small matter to you," Toby flinched at the accent; "merely to copy a few words which I shall write, purporting to come from the lady herself. In order that you may accomplish the task entirely to my satisfaction

I must ask you to study at your leisure the handwriting of these letters." He selected one or two and handed them over.

"You mean you wish me to imitate the handwriting?" Sir Francis smiled.

"You take me exactly, my good Toby. It is pleasant to transact business with one so intelligent." Toby collected the letters and put them carefully away. Sir Francis hummed a light air and carelessly balanced a pen on the tip of his finger, but no movement passed unobserved by his keen, hawk-like eyes. Toby's blind obedience puzzled him slightly.

"You will oblige me by completing the copy in a day or two," he said pleasantly, as his visitor took his hat.

"Yes, Sir Francis." The baronet frowned as the door shut.

"Were it not that the fellow is incapable of it, I might suspect a counterplot," he muttered; then, with a disdainful gesture, "ridiculous, pure fancy. The fellow's an oaf, a clown; I hold him in my hand."

There was very little sleep for Jerry that night, nor for many following. The restless footsteps, the long drawn sighs, wrung his heart.

"If he would but let me help," he murmured, as he stole away in the early morning to snatch a short rest before the business of the day began. The cloud grew blacker, heavier. Reuben watched his companions with soft, puzzled eyes—eyes which saw clearly to the bottom of things.

"There is trouble in the house," he said to Jerry one evening as they walked together. "You think I do not see; that I hear not. But I know—I know. There are messages which kom at night—there are evil things which lurk outside, and there are others which wear the clothes of honest men. And our Toby suffers. Ach," he sighed deeply. "It is a strange, mad world; I know not what exactly is his care, and we cannot ask. Some day he will tell us. Meantime, we must be patient and help with our hearts."

During the long dreary weeks which followed, it was a

relief to know that Reuben shared and understood. But ah, the heavy weight which lay on the once gay household. At the end of the second day Toby's task was finished. Reading the copy, he found a certain satisfaction; if what Sir Francis said was true—and he had no reason to doubt it—the letter was only a confirmation. It was short—"Just a few words," it ran, "to tell you that I am to marry Sir Francis Crewe within a few weeks. Please do not write, nor attempt to dissuade me; my mind is firmly made up. Neither do I wish this spoken of at present; I tell you first, as being perhaps, the most interested."

Toby read it again and again; there was something not altogether satisfactory. But having put his hand to the plough he turned not back, and the letter was taken to the baronet.

Whatever cloud hung over the Jew's household, it was not shared from without. Never had London seemed so fair. Lightheartedness sang through the crowded streets, mirth tripped airily along, and jollity, with clumsy footsteps, ambled cheerfully beside her. The scarlet and gold of royal liveries became an everyday sight, dukes and duchesses were as blackberries on a hedge, celebrities might be seen at any time. Court dressmakers and tailors made fortunes. Out came the crimson and ermine robes, out came the fabulous old lace, the state coaches, the liveries and powder, wigs and silk stockings, gold lace and plush. Coronets were taken from their boxes, family jewels re-set, the old abbey cleaned and decorated, and in the midst of it all, a girl queen, young and fair, with thoughtful eyes and grave demeanour, awaited the event which was to put her at the head of a great and glorious nation—a nation which, under her wise rule, was to become greater and more glorious still. Little wonder that England stood still with bated breath, till the golden crown should be set on the youthful head.

Far away, in little country villages, loyal love showed itself in preparations for feasting. Old men and women spoke of past coronations; there were those who could remember

that other long and peaceful reign under the third George. Young ones looked forward to prosperous trade, to glory at home and abroad. Many a fervent prayer went up for the fair young queen, and English hearts swelled with love and pride, and English men and women would have given their life-blood that sunny June to shield her from even the shadow of harm. From her palace came messages that all was well, and England knew that the maiden's great heart had met and mingled with the heart of her kingdom, that her first and purest love was given to her country and her people.

At last, after a night of joyful sleeplessness, the great day dawned, a day to be remembered throughout the ages. London, garbed in its best, went abroad to see all that was to be seen. Flags and banners fluttered gaily in the June sunshine, and for many, many hours, London's streets were filled with that curious phenomenon, grave almost to sadness, yet, therefore, fuller, perhaps, of deep happiness—a London crowd.

The old house in the square was closed like its fellows. Reuben, gay as a boy, and Jerry, in his sober way equally delighted, set out in the early dawn. Toby, after much persuasion, had been induced to accompany them, and the three pairs of broad shoulders cleared a way easily through the fighting, jostling, yet good-humoured throng.

Down by the abbey the press was thickest, but strength prevailed, and the three, panting, hot, and triumphant, took up their places at a spot where all that was worth seeing was to be seen. There had been detours by the way; rescues of small children and frail women. Reuben had carried a baby for many yards, and even now, Jerry's and Toby's broad shoulders bore small boys, eager for a peep over the seething heads into the world beyond.

"Ach, it is a great day," solemnly asserted the Jew, mopping his head, and handing cherries, just bought, to every child within reach. The sun rose higher and higher; under its blazing, scorching rays, the panting, perspiring crowd grew silent. Each minute brought fresh interests. Scarlet and gold

of mounted troops, the dark, brilliant uniform of a naval officer going to his place, the silver and flaunting colours of powdered footmen mingled with the pale young green of trees, the deep blue of summer skies, and the shadowy greys and browns of the old abbey, smiling as it remembered other crowds, other fair young heads bearing crowns, or perhaps sadly, black-robed mourners, softly chanting monks, dim candles, and white flowers, and always, through the centuries, pomp and ceremonial, majestic dignity, pride of age and ancestry, with a knowledge that in the ages to come, its old stones, though perhaps scattered, would carry always those same proud memories.

Guests began to arrive, well known faces seen through open carriage windows; glimpses of beautiful women, flashing of precious stones, soft sheen of ermine, gleaming of white arms and shoulders. The crowd, roused to enthusiasm, cheered each carriage. Reuben, with all the ardent excitement of the French character, shouted and cheered till forcibly suppressed by Jerry. Even Toby roused to smiling interest. Jerry himself looked and looked, till the scene seemed to mingle into one dense forest of colour and sound. Suddenly his vision cleared, things stood out plain and distinct. A state carriage, apparently the same as many others, yet carrying a well known crest and liveries, was passing slowly by, and his heart stood still as one of its occupants leaned eagerly forward.

Crimson ermine and flashing stones, paled into nothingness, only a sweet face looked, it seemed to him, straight into his. Eyes blue as the skies above, golden hair beneath a radiance of diamonds; a glimpse, a flash, and it was gone, leaving a sense of joy in his heart, a knowledge that the day's happiness was intensified by her nearness. He watched the receding carriage, picturing the fair face among other fair faces, against the rich sombre background of the abbey, and he knew with a triumphant knowledge that others would fade before its beauty, as stars fade when the moon appears.

Higher and higher rose the sun, weary legs shifted and

moved their owners into other places; the crowd surged and swayed, now and then making a wild, apparently objectless, lurch forward, only to be checked by the mounted troops. Children slept in their mothers' arms, older ones rested their heads against any support forthcoming and dozed fitfully. The great clock struck ten—even as it did so, from afar off, came a deep boom-boom, and the crowd roused to eagerness again.

"She is starting," rang the hushed whisper from a million tongues, and as it died, came the sound of music, the marching of feet.

On it came—the great procession, mid din of voices, the hum of greeting; on—on—to their allotted places went the troops—then, distant yet, but clear, the sound of cheering, nearer still, the hush, which precedes some great event stirred into life, as leafy trees stir at the coming of a breeze.

"She's coming—she's coming."

The pageant moved on—mid the gorgeousness of household troops, the brilliant uniforms of the surrounding guard, eight fairy ponies drawing a glittering fairy coach, and inside a young girl, quiet and sedate, yet no doubt with fluttering heart and tearful eyes, and hands that trembled with the weight they would have to hold.

The hush broke. A million voices raised themselves, a million hearts uttered prayers as she passed, gracious, smiling, grave. Under the stately walls, amidst the hushed expectancy of those gathered there, she passed, the heavy doors closed, and a great silence fell on the waiting multitude. Almost, it seemed, they could follow the scene within—the gorgeous assemblage, the unrobing and robing again of the girl queen, the strange quaint ceremonial, the taking of the power into those small hands, the sceptre of ruling, the orb of strength, the cloak of majesty—on, through each reverent event, to the last great one, the placing of England's crown on the youthful head. A thrill ran through the assemblage, communicating itself to those outside. And the bells rang

out—joyous, happy bells—telling a loyal rejoicing people that their queen was queen indeed. Guns boomed, horses pranced and clattered on the stones, all the bells of London joined in; cheer after cheer rang from throats already hoarse with cheering, and amid the noise and sound, the bustle and crowding, the procession started once more, this time to take its homeward way by a longer route.

The crowd, anxious to lose nothing, with one accord broke, making for other points of vantage. Pressing, surging, it swept on; in a moment Jerry was separated from his friends, Reuben and Toby being carried with the throng, the Jew wearing a comical look of dismay. Jerry had no intention of leaving his place until certain that every chance of seeing the beautiful vision again was gone. In the rush he had been carried some distance, now, turning, he elbowed his way back. The crowd, meeting him, was harder to fight; it took all his strength, but he was determined, and, step by step, fought his way. Here and there it thinned, and he took breath, and within a few yards of the first position, found a break in the packed mass.

Taking the opportunity, he turned in, the crowd drew together again, there was a halt in the onward rush. Two or three rough-looking men caught his attention; a laugh, a woman's scream, a gleam of crimson against their dull clothes, made him catch his breath. Suddenly, remembrance brought back the past, the crimson breast, the cruel hand. He made a rush forward, struck with his doubled fist the mouth which uttered the words, hit wildly at another, and with one great effort caught the crimson gleam as it fell, lifting it in his arms as though suddenly endowed with superhuman strength. For one wild rapturous moment he clasped the slight form to his heart, wondering if its loud beating would wake the unconscious girl.

Gathering the rich cloak round her, fighting, pushing, he gained a few yards, then was stopped by a movement. Glancing downwards, he looked straight into the blue eyes,

and memory brought visions of cool deep pools in the heart of the woods.

"Don't move," he whispered. "You're safe—quite safe; only keep still."

She obeyed, but he felt her thrill as the crowd pressed close; he even fancied that she clung nearer to him. He knew he held her close, sheltered from the rude press, close to his heart, and life held no more for him. He cried inwardly to himself. "This is life. Whatever happens, I have lived, even if only for this short time." Another moment and he stood free—the crowd swept on; Mary Cloudesley slipped from his arms, and stooping, gathered the cloak into her hand, apparently searching carefully for torn places. But the trembling hands and deeply flushed face told of time needed to gain her composure. In a moment she stood up.

"Sir, how can I thank you; another minute, and—" she shivered and drew her hand across her eyes as though to shut out a possible happening; then, "I cannot think how it came about. My father told me to wait a moment, the carriage was not there, and somehow, I suppose, I moved, and in a moment, before I knew where I was, I was in the crowd. Some man—" the sweet voice trembled, a hot blush mantled the lovely face. Jerry drew near.

"But it's all right now; you're safe, my lady." She looked up in surprise.

"Yes, thanks to you, sir. But how did you know?"

"My lady, I come from Cloudesley."

"From Cloudesley!" Ah, how the beautiful face lighted up; she clapped her little gloved hands. "Oh, how charming. Come, we must find my father, and he shall thank you himself." She gathered her flounced skirts round her, and impulsively, as a child might, stretched out her hand and took his.

The thrill of her touch, the magic of her voice, carried Jerry into fairyland. He was a child again; clearly, amidst the din and clatter of bells and voices, came the one dear

voice: "Some day, Jerry boy, you'll find a fairy, I hope; and she'll take your hand, and all the world will grow golden —sorrow and care will melt away, and you'll feel so strong and happy. And the fairy will lead you—" The words faded, the little hand slipped from his. The earl stood before them with a troubled, anxious face. In a moment she had put her arm through his, and the look of anxiety changed to one of sternness.

"How did it happen, Mary? And who is this?"

"Father, dear father, I'm so sorry. I don't know a bit how it happened, only I found myself in that terrible crowd, and this gentleman saved me as I fell. And, father, he comes from Cloudesley." The earl turned, his face inscrutable under its mask.

"I am greatly in your debt, sir. But for your prompt aid my daughter might have sustained some life-long injury, if not worse. You come from Cloudesley?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And your name? Pardon me for inquiring. Believe me, it is not from mere curiosity."

"My name is Dell, my lord—Jerry Dell—and I was brought up by Mrs. Hagges." The earl gazed thoughtfully at him, then his brow cleared.

"I remember. Your father was a sculptor, was he not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And you are following in his footsteps?" Jerry inclined his head. The earl went on:

"I should like to thank you, Mr. Dell, in a more leisurely way. Would it be troubling you if I asked you to call upon me at your convenience?"

Jerry flushed with pleasure.

"I should be delighted, my lord, at any time which will suit you best."

"Then, shall we say to-morrow morning?" And with bated breath, Jerry agreed. Two chances that day had fallen on

his path; another was hanging in the veil of to-morrow. Fate was indeed kind. The earl bowed gravely.

"Then I shall expect you in the morning. Till then, good-day." But Mary Cloudesley put out her little hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Dell, and thank you very much."

Hat in hand he stood by, watching her step into the stately carriage, envying the footmen who lifted her train and cloak, who might see and hear her every day, and catching a last glimpse of the bonnie blue eyes, the sweet radiant smile. Then, as the splendid equipage drove away and was lost in the medley of other carriages, he turned homewards, wondering at the beauty of the day, the glory of the skies and summer sunshine, wondering, wondering, till wonderment turned to dreams and a fairy palace began to build itself, airy, ethereal, yet with a solidity lacking hitherto. And he knew a fairy had laid its foundation stone and christened it Love.

CHAPTER VII

OF THE BUILDING OF A CASTLE; AND HOW THE BROWNIE FAIRY CAME HOME

CLOTHES! Romance fled, even the radiance of waking to a day of days paled before the vision of himself as he appeared to himself. Lying awake in the early summer morning, everything else was forgotten, only the puzzle remained—how could he look his best? True, a new suit, as yet unworn, lay in a drawer, and he rejoiced in a ruffled shirt and smart Malacca cane; for, be it whispered, in a small niche of Jerry's heart stood an altar reared to the goddess of fashion; very insignificant, often lost sight of, but nevertheless, a factor in the whole; also, inherited perhaps, was a love of cleanliness, freshness, and pleasant surroundings; which things, subdued and held in check, soften and keep from coarseness a strong and vigorous character.

He rose and laid out the various garments; then proceeded to dress. It was a lengthy business and a distasteful one. The long pier glass reflected his tall figure, broad shoulders and massive chest, and he longed unspeakably for the slender elegance, the graceful carriage of Sir Francis Crewe. He thought of Mary Cloudesley and turned cold at the remembrance of having held her, that dainty, fairy-like form, in his strong arms, her soft draperies contaminated by contact with his rough clothes, her little hand in his stained, gloveless one. How could he approach her again? And then came an appalling thought—perhaps he might not see her to-day. Out went the sun, down dropped darkness and despair. Then hope pushed her head up again, and he finished his dressing.

He gazed in a dissatisfied way at the dark blue cloth coat,

the gilt buttons, polished till they caught every gleam of light, the close fitting breeches, the broad expanse of white waistcoat. Suddenly struck by an idea, he opened a drawer and drew out the soft gold fob chain and the great topaz seal. As he slipped the catch on to his cheap silver watch, a little pang of compunction seized him. He had been in London nearly three years and was no nearer finding its owner than when he came. At first he had waited for more knowledge of London; then, after making fruitless inquiries, he had told Reuben the story. As usual, the Jew made it his business, but up to now no information had been forthcoming, and for the last few weeks Toby's trouble had put everything else from his mind. In a way he felt that the ornament was not his own, but the temptation was too much.

"I'll borrow it just for the day," he said to himself, and with a last glance went downstairs, somewhat shamefaced, as he thought of the Jew's kindly quizzical face and Toby's sorrowful one. Toby was already down. On this great day Jerry was forbidden to assist, and his thin face lit up as he met his friend.

"Jerry, you do look grand; quite the gentleman." Jerry blushed hotly.

"Do I, Toby? Do I really? Look well, and tell me if I am all right." Toby put down a dish, and turning, looked him up and down approvingly. Then suddenly the thin cheeks flushed and paled; a look of terror, of anguish—which was it?—came into the tired eyes, and with a stifled cry he stepped forward, grasping the seal with nervous, trembling fingers.

"Jerry, Jerry, where did you get it? How—who—gave it to you? Or did you buy it?"

"No." Jerry's voice was puzzled; was it part of Toby's mystery? "It was given me in trust for one to whom it belongs. His mother—" He broke off, for Toby had sunk into a chair, and leaning his arms upon a table, dropped his head upon them, and was moaning bitterly.

"Toby—what is it?" He put his arm round the heaving

shoulders. "Toby, tell me." The moaning stopped; Toby lifted his head.

"Jerry—I must—I can't keep it any longer—and I can trust you. Don't speak of it, don't tell Reuben. The seal is mine, I'm Toby Plumtre—Tobias, after my father. Oh, my dear, dear father. Jerry, I killed him, as surely as though I had used a dagger or poison, with my bad ways." Again the head dropped—the moaning changed to great sobs. "My mother, oh, Jerry, my mother." Jerry was silent; such grief as this must have its own way. The heavy sobs ceased at last. Once more Toby lifted his poor white face—so pinched and worn.

"Jerry, you won't say I told you. You'll let everything be the same. Don't speak of it, even to me."

"N-no," then hastily, "No, no, of course not. But, Toby," his voice grew graver, "why don't you go home? She's longing for you. If you only knew how she wants you."

"I know, I know," was the quick answer. "But not yet—not yet. Jerry—" he was standing close; he spoke in a whisper, with furtive glances round. "Some day, soon now, oh, I hope soon, I shall go back. Pray God, she may still be there, and then, ah, my God," the whisper, though so low, seemed to ring through the hall, "freedom, happiness, and—love and life for her. Will it ever come? Jerry, I count the hours, the minutes almost." He rose quickly with a warning "hush." Reuben's footsteps sounded in the gallery above. "Wear it, Jerry, please, dear old fellow. And don't forget, secrecy!" He seized his hand, wrung it, and vanished into back regions.

The Jew came down the broad stairs, caught Jerry by the shoulder, and turned him towards the great window, smiling broadly.

"Ach, mein yongling, goest thou courting?"

The hot flush rose on Jerry's face. He pulled himself away, almost angrily. Reuben laughed and nodded as he prepared the coffee; smiling again, half sadly, at the untasted breakfast, the constant glance at the clock, but took no further notice. It is at these great moments of youth that every-

day details assume importance. Jerry's mind was running on the question, "Should he take a hackney coach, or should he not?" The Jew, watching quietly, read his thoughts.

"Why should you ride, mein yongling? With strong young legs, and a fine morning, and time. Nein, nein, it is but pride to take a coach." So, in the glory of sunshine, new clothes, with wildly beating heart, and a sick feeling of despair, a certainty of appearing country bred, and much internal trembling, Jerry set off. The two faces watched him cross the square, then turned in, Toby with a deep sigh, the Jew smiling, yet wearing an expression of sadness.

"So they try their wings, these young ones, and they know their strength, and so they fly away. But for the old comes loneliness. Ach, well, it is life."

The earl's town house was at Chelsea; a long walk, and Jerry found himself amid fields and country surroundings before he reached his destination. Strangely enough, it never occurred to him that the front entrance might be intended for greater visitors than himself. Although conscious of shabbiness, of country breeding, never had the idea of inferiority entered his head. Well attired, and with a full knowledge of social ways, he would have held his own with all the world. The earl received him in a library, dark panelled, book lined, and came to the point at once.

"For myself, Mr. Dell, and in my daughter's name, I must again thank you for your prompt action yesterday. But I did not ask you to come here to listen to a few empty words. My sister has spoken of you, and although at the time, not having the pleasure of a personal acquaintance," he bowed graciously, "I paid little attention, yet it comes back to me that she has the highest possible opinion of your abilities." It was Jerry's turn to bow. "Moreover, she believes that you will carve for yourself a name in the annals of fame. Whether that be so or no," he waved his hand smilingly, "I cannot say, but if you will undertake a commission from me, I will take my chance of future fame."

"I shall be pleased to do all I can, my lord," answered Jerry, colouring with pleasure.

The earl shifted in his seat, paused thoughtfully, as though choosing his words, and went on:

"You may not be aware, Mr. Dell, although, no doubt, all Cloudesley knows it, that my daughter is destined for the Church." Jerry looked up, hardly grasping the import.

"For the Church?" he repeated. The earl's face grew stern.

"I repeat—for the Church. She enters the Convent of St. Monica after Christmas. It is natural that I should wish for some memento, some—some—" he broke off abruptly, then changed the sentence. "I should be glad, Mr. Dell, if you will undertake the work, a bust, life size, to be executed in marble. I will pay you well, for it is a difficult undertaking for one so young; also it must be put in hand at once. There is not too much time," he added slowly, as though to himself. "What do you say, Mr. Dell?" Jerry's heart seemed to stand still. He stammered out something, but the earl understood, and smiled in a gratified way.

"I know, I know. It is a great thing. Lady Mary Cloudesley—if good, enough to make a man's name. But—" he rose as though to terminate the interview, "I am deeply in your debt, and it has always been my custom to pay off all my obligations. You accept, I think?"

"Yes, my lord, most gratefully."

"Then you must arrange for sittings and so forth with my daughter's governess. I will send her to you at once. Good-day to you, Mr. Dell."

In a whirl of excitement Jerry received his commands. The next morning, and again in three days, and afterwards as he pleased. The governess, an elderly lady of good birth, departed, singing the praises of the handsome young artist to her charge, little dreaming of the fluttering heart under the demure exterior, the remembrance of the strong arms which had held her, of two anxious brown eyes which had gazed into hers.

The happiness of new born love is not happiness, rather it is torture, agony, with occasional glimpses of a paradise beyond earthly conception. Added to this was the terrible fact that in a few short months the dark gates of the convent would swallow her up for ever. And Jerry, tossing, turning on his bed, listening for Toby's restless footsteps, would think and think, plan and plan, till his head whirled, and he came back to first facts. He, a poor man, of no family, with a future to make, was no mate for an earl's daughter, whether in a convent or out of it. Conscience bade him thrust away the beautiful dream, bade him pray for strength to fight the long lonely years, for honour to bury his love deep in his heart, and for work—grinding, toilsome work—to keep him from thinking, from utter despair, from something worse.

Ah, those were days of unspeakable misery, and yet he would not have been without them. The hours he spent in her dear presence, listening to the clear young voice, watching the beautiful face; those unforgettable hours, each minute stamped deep in his memory. Sometimes he fancied the blue eyes lifted themselves to his with a look of more than passing interest. But he told himself that it was indeed fancy. There were times of rest for both sitter and artist. Then the talk would turn on Cloudesley and Betty.

"I'm afraid she finds her life dull," said Mary, thoughtfully puckering her white forehead. "She's so fond of excitement and gaiety. And lately her letters have seemed almost sad. Not that I get many," she laughed gaily, "Betty was always a bad correspondent."

In the hot summer mornings the governess dozed quietly; they were practically alone. Outside, green lawns and gaudy flower beds stretched away under steel blue skies, giving the shady cool room a dreamlike quality. So silent, so still was everything, that in spite of their owners' attempts at repression, their own hearts told each other tales, and though they spoke not, utterance found itself in other ways.

"I love you, I love you," whispered the buzzing bee to the roses in the great bow pots which stood everywhere.

"Do you love me, do you love me?" sang the vine leaves on the house to the gentle summer breeze. And all the long hot days, all the stilly starlit nights, flowers, birds, insects, universal nature murmured their song—"I love you—I love you—for ever—for ever."

So the days passed. The work grew. Never before had Jerry done so well; and he knew it, as a true artist knows the quality of his own handiwork. The earl, too, realised that he had found, if not a genius, at least an artist. He would come in occasionally, speak a few courteous words of praise, or point out a desired alteration. Sometimes, too, when the room was empty, when night had fallen, he would lock the door, and lifting the damp cloths from the clay model, stand gazing, gazing, as he never gazed at the original. Then carefully covering it up, he would go to his lonely room, sighing as he paused outside his daughter's chamber, sometimes even gently opening the door to look for one moment on the fair sleeping face on its lace pillow.

July passed. London emptied itself, and sank into a sullen sleep. My lord took his daughter to a fashionable watering-place. The heat of the last few weeks had told upon her, so the physicians said, and she drooped like a flower, losing interest in everything. When they returned in September the sittings would be resumed.

To say "Good-bye till we meet again" was anguish, to keep from showing it, torture. What the real good-bye—good-bye for ever—would be, neither dared think. They shook hands calmly—the thrill of contact making both hearts beat as one—a few conventional words, and it was over. Then, with a murmured word to her governess, Mary fled to her room, locked the door, and flinging herself on her bed, buried her burning face in the soft cool pillows. For knowledge had come to her, knowledge of a world beyond the convent walls; of bliss beyond the bliss of religion, of love, of longing, and

tender joy. Oh, but the days were long—long, and sad and weary. Morning broke after hot restless nights, with the thought of another day to be lived through, and evening fell, bringing the meeting a day nearer.

And the deep, dark shadow over the old house in the square grew deeper and darker. But in the third week the cloud rolled up a corner for Jerry, showing the golden radiance behind, and Pan's melancholy piping changed to a happier key.

"She is coming back—coming back—" he said to himself as he woke each morning. "Another night gone—another day nearer." Time, that strange variable thing, which mocks at happiness, and lingers long with sorrow, laughed and passed on. The last day of weary waiting came, as all things come.

Lingering round the house at Chelsea, as long ago he had lurked in fields and meadows for a glimpse of the wonderful being described by Betty, he had caught hints of preparation. It was not the first time by many. Most days or nights had found him somewhere in the neighbourhood of her home. That afternoon he returned unspeakably happy, wondering if the moment would ever come when he would see her again, turning icy cold with the thought of what possible dangers might assail her between this and then.

Slowly, so slowly, the clock in the hall ticked off its minutes. Slowly the burning sunshine through the great window turned rosy red, fading to twilight. Slowly darkness, the soft velvety darkness of an August night, fell. The Jew lit candles, Toby brought supper, cleared it away, and as usual the three men sat round the table smoking. It was many a long day since Toby had helped much in the way of conversation, and Jerry of late was too busy with his own thoughts. Reuben gazed doubtfully from one to the other, sighed a little, and at last relapsed into silence.

The clouds of smoke curled upwards, floating airily away to the dim dome. Toby reached across and snuffed the candles. Far off, over the quiet streets, through open windows, came the hum of London by night, gay, light-hearted. Then,

on the pavement of the square, the sound of a woman's footsteps fell, timid, hesitating, dragging as though very tired, and so soft that they were only perceptible because of the stillness around. A minute later the great knocker of the door was lifted gently. Toby half started from his chair, then sat back, his face ashen white. The Jew, with a quick glance, rose and stepped quietly across the hall, and round the corner towards the door. Jerry put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"There's nothing to fear, Toby; it's someone for Reuben, no doubt." The heavy bars fell, the door was opened, and a woman's low voice mingled with Reuben's guttural tones.

"Kom in, kom in," they heard him say, and Toby's face grew calm.

"Jerry, mein yongling, here is someone who would see you."

"See me?" cried Jerry, his face crimson, for every thought was of her, the smallest event connected itself with her. He rose and went towards the end of the hall, passing Reuben returning with a smiling face. In the half darkness he could only distinguish a small form standing close against the doorway, a timid, shrinking figure, which advanced fearfully. So small was it, so bent, and the face it lifted to his under the great bonnet was worn and old, though not with age, only bitter experience. Yet in it was a look which flooded his mind with remembrance. Nearer it came, then lifting two hands from beneath the shawl, laid them upon his arm.

"Master Jerry, oh, Master Jerry, don't you know me? Have you forgotten Margery?"

"Margery," he echoed, gazing earnestly into the dim blue eyes. "Margery—" then suddenly, with a catching sob, he drew her to him. "Margery, Margery, dear, dear Margie. You've come at last—after all these years."

He could feel the tiny figure shrink and flutter as he held her, but the voice was quiet and even.

"Yes, Master Jerry, I've come at last. Oh, sir," with a pitiful note of entreaty, "you'll take care of me, won't you?"

"Take care of you, Margie," he cried fondly; "why, I'll

never let you go again, not if you want to ever so badly." For answer she slipped quietly from his arms, staggered, and would have fallen but that he caught her.

"It's nothing, Master Jerry, only I'm very tired, an'—if—you'd give me—a drop of—milk." He lifted her in his strong arms, the tired eyes closed, the light weight grew dead.

Reuben came to meet him, and together they laid her on a couch. With gentle, almost womanly touch, the Jew drew off the big heavy bonnet, loosened the shawl, and administered a stimulant. Presently she opened her eyes and would have risen.

"Not yet—not yet." He put her gently back, then busied himself with the preparation of hot milk. Jerry and Toby, the work taken for once out of their hands, could only look on. Presently he returned, and waving the two aside, proceeded to feed her slowly. There was a strange moisture in the kind eyes as he watched every spoonful almost greedily swallowed.

"Poor thing—poor thing—" he murmured. "But you must go slow—slow. We will now wait a time." There was a trace of colour in the grey face. She lifted herself.

"Master Jerry, I'm better now. I'll sit up." Once more the Jew bustled round; the easy chair, cushioned and low, was brought near, a high hassock placed, and in a few minutes she was gazing at them with a perplexed air, yet too tired to ask questions.

"You won't mind, Mr. Gade, if she has my room, will you?" whispered Jerry, drawing the Jew on one side. Reuben glared ferociously.

"She will not haf your room, nein—it is small and poor, and smells of paint. She will haf the best room in the house, and Toby has prepared it. He knows my ways—he is a good boy."

No argument could turn him; the great bedroom looking over the square was made ready and Margery taken to it. Jerry, going in later, found her sleeping quietly, the light,

soft sleep which comes with middle age; yet, even as he watched, she roused and moaned, then broke into a pitiful cry. He soothed her to rest again, but many times that night he crept in, and each time the wailing cry repeated itself.

It was not until the summer dawn broke that the house settled to sleep; even Toby, forgetful of his own troubles, was awake, waiting for Jerry's reports. Down below the Jew smoked and listened, thoughtfully musing and gazing at the shawl and bonnet thrown on a chair. Now and then he would touch them gently, as though to assure himself of their reality.

"Strange," he murmured, "that so small a thing should mean so much. It is a pleasant thing to know that a woman is in the house. Ach—" he sighed deeply, "she has seen trouble, oh, moch trouble—poor thing—poor thing."

But the tiny frail form had wonderful recuperative powers. Toby, brush in hand, was startled next morning by a strange light footstep on the stair. She was coming down, slowly, to be sure, but with a firmer tread, and a fixed determination to do something in return for bed and lodging. In vain he entreated, commanded, even threatened; without a word, she took the brush from him and went to work. Jerry, fetched in desperation, could do no more, and at last they realised that it was a new-born happiness, a bringing back of old times. When the Jew began his usual task of coffee making, she quietly took the utensils from him, continuing the job in a business-like way, which caused him to lift his hands in admiration.

But when it was finished, she allowed him to put her into the armchair, to see that she had the daintiest pieces, the best of everything. Never was such coffee. Reuben went into ecstasies and demanded a third cup.

"I haf not tasted such coffee," he cried, "no—not since my French mothair made it—twenty—thirty—years ago—when we were yong—myself and my brothers—and now, they are gone —all gone."

"It was a Frenchwoman taught me," said Margery timidly.

"Ha—said I not so," cried Reuben triumphantly. "Well, madame, we cannot let you go while you make such coffee; you will stay, will you not, and be our Hebe?"

Toby met Jerry's glance across the table; some of his care had fallen from him, and there was laughter in his eyes.

For Jerry, that day was but a continuation of nightly dreams; the shaded, flower-scented room, outside, as it seemed to him it must always be, green lawns, and blazing colour under the burning sun of late summer. Mary welcomed him warmly, putting her little hand in his, and lifting sweetest eyes, dropped them with a flush and a momentary trembling, for in that swift glance each knew again the other's secret. He lingered, prolonging his work till the governess grew impatient, and he must go.

A new atmosphere greeted him as he entered the hall, a queer indefinable sense of something there which had hitherto been missing; Margery bustling round laying the cloth for dinner, having stolen a march on Toby, accounted for it, and Reuben put it into words, nodding delightedly at her as Jerry entered.

"Ach, mein yongling, it is good, is it not, to see a woman, to hear her voice, and to listen to the swish-swish as she moves?"

Without asking, ignoring all three men, she took the reins into her own hands. Yet Jerry seemed to know instinctively that the old Margery was gone. His recollections were of cheerfulness, laughter, endearing words, but this quiet, silent woman was no link with the past. Her face, grave and inscrutable, hardly altered its expression; no smile flitted across it. Again the Jew supplied the solution. He watched her carry out the dishes with a pitying, troubled look; then turned to Jerry.

"There is trouble there. Ach, Gott, she has seen trouble." Then solemnly, "Mein yongling, pray the good Gott that you

may not see such trouble." He paused thoughtfully, then fetching out the usual after-dinner cigar, lighted it, and after a few puffs, went on.

"She has lived with Indians."

"Indians!" Jerry started. Reuben nodded vehemently.

"Yes, with Indians, and she has caught that grave, immovable expression which is a mask for everything, for all the emotions. She will lose it one day, and then she will be a different woman. But—" he laid his hand on Jerry's, "we must not trouble her, nor ask questions. She will tell us all in her own time."

CHAPTER VIII

JERRY AND THE BROWNIE FAIRY START ON A QUEST

MARGERY took time for telling her tale. At the end of two days they knew no more than when she arrived. Jerry asked her how she had found him, and she replied that she had Messrs. Gardiner's address and had gone to them. But she vouchsafed nothing more, and they asked no other questions.

On the third evening, however, she went to Jerry's room. He was sitting by the window, ostensibly reading, in reality building that wonderful dream castle, which now grew steadily. It only wanted a certain thing called life—or as some people term it, reality—to become the most beautiful thing in Heaven or earth.

Toby was out on one of his mysterious errands, and Jerry's dreams were tinged with blackness. Although more often than not he went on his own account, yet there were times when the stealthy knock came at the door beneath the golden balls. Jerry was growing used to the veiled woman, the lurking shadow behind her. To-night, however, they were not present. Margery stood by his side, a little frail figure, trembling just now with something like excitement.

"Sit down, Margery," he cried, jumping up and putting her into his chair. She shook her head.

"Sir, I'll stand; I can tell it better when I'm standing. Master Jerry," she put her hand on his arm, speaking almost eagerly, "have you plenty of money?" He smiled fondly down at her.

"Yes, Margery, plenty. There's all that was left to me, you know, besides my dear father's."

"Yes." She stood thinking, yet her face betrayed no secret.

Presently she looked up. "Master Jerry, I want you to take me on a journey, a long journey, a journey of several days. It will cost money, but you will be glad you've spent it. Will you?" He wondered what lay behind those dim eyes; clear-headedness, he was sure; there was no sign that trouble had touched her mind.

"Where is it, Margery?" he asked. She shook her head.

"I can't tell you, sir; you must trust me. Oh, Master Jerry, you'll be glad, you'll thank me. I'll not ask you anything more; just this one thing." At any other time he would have consented without hesitation. But now, to leave London, the sittings—Mary. It was as though Margery was cutting his heart strings. She stood silent; only by the trembling fingers, the fluttering heart-beats, could he know what the answer meant to her. That something of importance hung on it was obvious; what, he could not guess, unless it was to renew her relations with her family. He remembered they lived in Scotland, she had told him when he was quite small; yes, that must be it.

He weighed matters; another three sittings, four at the outside, and the dream would be over. Suppose he took a fortnight, that would prolong it. Suddenly his mind was made up.

"Yes, Margery, I'll go." She lifted her hands from his arm with an almost inaudible sigh of relief. "But—" he laughed down at her, "who'll do the business if I'm not to know anything? There'll be seats to be taken, rooms at inns, and so on."

"I know, Master Jerry," she answered evasively; "but I've travelled much lately, and if you'll give me the money, I'll see to it all; and—and—" there was just a touch of expression in her face, "if I want any help, Reuben'll give it."

"Very well. But, Margie, I can't start yet, not for a week or so; will that do?"

"The sooner the better, sir; you see, there's my keep. I can't be taking up the best bedroom and having all I have without paying, and I've got no money."

"That's all right, Margie," he put his arm round her as though to shield her, "I'll settle with Reuben." But he reckoned without his host. Never had he seen the Jew in such a passion as when he suggested payment.

"Pay—pay! You would insult me with your dirty gold. Ach, you can go—go to hell with your Margery, but do not offer me money for happiness." He sat down heavily, exhausted with the violent outbreak. Jerry would have expostulated, but he waved him aside.

"You can go, yes, you can go, but never kom here again. And for me," the words trembled, he rested his head on a shaking hand, "I shall be once more lonely—lonely; and more —I shall be broken-hearted. Ach, mein yongling," he rose and stood by Jerry, "I am old and hot-tempered; but stay with me, you and she; for it is no longer a house for shelter—it is a home with a good woman in it."

Nothing more was said; even Toby dared not suggest a bead in the jar of good deeds, and Margery stayed, making secret arrangements.

The dark hanging cloud over the hall lightened a little; even Toby's song was heard occasionally. Was it passing for good? But the great cloud of trouble is always there; it moves, rolling on to another place, and as it lifted from the old house in the square it gathered black and lowering over little Cloudesley, over the inn, over its inmates, blackest of all, even dropping its dark bitterness into her heart, over Betty—the passionate little heart, which loved and hated, and wanted things so badly.

Night after night she lay awake, sobbing for that which she had lost, had cast away in her childish petulance; or staring, dry-eyed, at the two friendly faces looking in upon her.

"Oh, Moon, Moon," she cried, "did you ever see sorrow like mine? Was ever such unhappiness?" Church Clock, listening, smiled into the other smiling face. "It'll pass, it'll pass," he whispered, adding gravely, "if she has strength to resist. We cannot help her; life must fight its own battles."

"Ah, Church Clock, she is so young, and knows nothing of real sorrow." And the two faces watched sadly, pityingly. So young, so beautiful, so lonely; none to help her. Jerry gone; Mary so far off; and Paul—Betty's tears broke out afresh when she thought of him, only to be dashed aside in angry pride. To turn to Francis Crewe was but natural. His visits were frequent; ostensibly for fishing or sketching, in reality to develop his plans. Soft flattery, tender words, courteous deference did their work; the honeyed, venomous words dropped in, assisted. "Paul was still with Louise da Silva," so he heard. "People said he would marry her in spite of all." Already the game seemed his; only the last card to play; would it be trumps? He hesitated, half fearful of the chance, and it was October when he put the final touch to his castle prison. Remained only the last rivet, the locking of the heavy chain weaving itself round little Betty.

There was a lingering sweetness of summer in the quiet woods and fields of Cloudesley. Silent was the village in the mellow afternoon sunlight, and in the lane dark shadows lay under the trees. He stood by the gate of the deserted cottage, waiting; Church Clock struck three, and trampling the shadows under her light feet, the sunshine flickering on her ruddy hair, came Betty, laughing, tripping gaily, sorrow thrust behind till night came. Dimpling, blushing, she put out her little brown hand; he held it in a long close pressure, gazing passionately into the sweet blushing face half turned from him.

"Betty—sweet—you got my letter?" She dropped her head slightly.

"And there were no questions asked—no?" He breathed in relief. "I'm glad—I would not have my dear one troubled. Betty," he was very near her, a floating ringlet touched his face, "did you wonder what brought me again so soon?" She gave him a laughing, coquettish look; he smiled down at her.

"You guessed, you rogue. Betty," the laughing accents grew soft, tender; he held her hand still and drew her nearer,

"Betty, you guessed a little—a tiny, tiny bit—but you never guessed—never even imagined a part of how I wanted you. Oh, Betty, sweetheart, I love you, I want you, I can't live without you. Tell me, dearest," the voice was a whisper, the dark face so close to hers that she could feel its warmth; she knew the passionate eyes were watching, watching, till their fiery glance almost burnt. "Say you love me, sweetheart."

Betty hung her head; the great moment had come—it was in her power to defy Paul—to show the world that there were other fish in the sea; and yet—she hesitated.

"I—I—don't—know." For answer he gathered her close in his arms, lifting her to his level, devouring the soft peach-like cheeks with his burning kisses.

"Now do you know, sweetheart?" he whispered, and Betty, her senses melting like snow by the fireside, her powers of resistance breaking down, lay still in his arms. But only for a moment.

"Let me go, Sir Francis," she whispered, and as though content, he put her away, only keeping his arms round her.

"I'm sorry, Betty—very sorry; I couldn't help it. Oh, Betty, you know not the fire of love. It burns—devours. Could not you give me a little in return?"

She stood silent. The pleading voice had rung in other ears, but perhaps never had their owner used them to better purpose. Almost—almost—they persuaded. A little time, a few more endearments, and a whispered "Yes," brought his heart to his mouth—set every pulse fluttering. The game was his.

"And you'll marry me, Betty—" he cried triumphantly, when the first wild burst of passion was over. "When? To-morrow—in a week. I can't wait longer." He stooped over the shining head resting against him. "Will you, sweetheart?"

And Betty, the die cast, risked her all. Paul should see—when she was a grand lady. When all London was at her feet, as Sir Francis promised, she would meet him one day with a sweeping curtsey of proud disdain. And the bliss of

the present was forgotten in the contemplation of the future.

So, gradually, he insinuated his way. The marriage must be secret; Farmer Chubbe would never consent to his niece marrying but of her position, and Betty knew the argument was good. Therefore it could not be in Cloudesley. Jerry should fetch her, take her to a lady, a friend of his, and they would be married by licence next morning.

"Then, my Betty, we'll spread our wings, and fly to warm sunny countries. You've never seen blue skies and blue seas, melting together under a southern sun. We'll go where the air is scented with orange blossom; where roses, crimson, pink, and yellow, make a riot of colour on grey rocks and white-roofed houses; where green lizards creep in and out stone walls, and dark-haired, soft-eyed maidens sing songs of love to their guitars, and the hot day melts into the cool dark night in a long lingering dream of love. And we'll come home by Paris—Paris the gay capital."

Betty shrank away with a little shiver.

"Not Paris," she murmured; "somehow, I don't think I want to see Paris."

"Then we'll come straight back to London," he answered gaily; "and my Betty will be the toast of the town, the envy of every woman, every man her slave."

So the wonderful story went on. The day was fixed—a fortnight hence; the hour, three in the afternoon. An ostensible visit to Mrs. Plumtre would allay suspicion till too late. Jerry should meet her on the high road outside Channington, and before she knew where she was, she would be Lady Crewe.

Dreamlike, the days flew by; Betty sang gaily at her work, thrusting into the background every thought, every foreboding whisper. She *would* be happy—she must be—she wanted happiness so badly. Thus, in the dull October weather, when the first winds of winter blew round the house and life sank to rest in the woods, the dark cloud dropped lower, wrapping the farm in its chilly mantle, and from leafless woods and rain-

sodden fields, Pan's music sang a melancholy dirge—a dirge for life dying, for dying love, for dead hopes.

Sir Francis' elation knew no bounds. Revenge, such as only devils dream of, would be his. And Betty's love—his—his—till he tired of it. A few trifles, and the plot was complete. Toby's deft fingers would write the letter purporting to come from Jerry, making final arrangements; as luck had it, he heard next day that Jerry himself was leaving London. There would be no chance of any mishap, and Sir Francis waited in silent triumph.

Margery, too, made her little plans. Jerry, leave of absence being granted by the earl, tore himself from the dear presence, and now declared himself ready to follow the old nurse to the ends of the world. The morning broke cloudy; later on the sun showed his face. They started from the Beehive Inn in La Belle Sauvage Yard, Reuben and Toby seeing them off, and in half an hour's time had left London behind them.

In spite of love sickness, Jerry's boyish enjoyment of the country broke out. There had been heavy rains, and the high road, free from dust, stretched wet and shining between hedgerows, each black twig hung with sparkling dewdrops. From the stubble fields rose birds with a loud whir-r-r where they passed, and as the day wore on and they drove deeper and deeper into the heart of England, even Margery's face caught something of the sweet peace of the country.

They stayed one night at Doncaster, going on to Berwick, and from there into the wild, fierce, north country. Green hedgerows changed to those of sturdy beech, crimsoning under the autumn sun, brick gave place to stone, and fields were bounded by walls of the same. Still later, they came to mountains, and a strange sense of something long, long since familiar, something far away, perhaps in another age, took possession of Jerry; that last day of travelling was, if possible, more silent than the preceding ones, and old Edinburgh, with its hills and stately palaces, brought it even nearer, for with it came back the romance of that fair sweet queen,

who loved and struggled, and wanted things so badly nearly three hundred years since. He could hear his father's voice telling the tale, and Holyrood, and something else, took hold of him.

From Edinburgh they posted. Through wild mountain passes, by lovely lakes and ruined castles, silent amid the silence, the curious feeling of kinship growing stronger. They stayed that night at a wayside inn. "And in a few hours we'll be there, sir," said Margery, as they started in the morning. It was two o'clock when she dismissed the postchaise. Jerry watched proceedings in amused bewilderment.

"Where do we stay the night, Margie? There's no inn in this place." Margery nodded mysteriously.

"You'll see." They walked through a wood of pines, giving on to a high road. About a mile further on they stopped. Two great gates of wrought iron, with crest and arms twined among other devices, towered like stern warders; beside them were two smaller entrances, and through one of these Margery turned.

A carriage road, firm and well kept, under over-arching trees, was cut through a park, where deer and cattle grazed. Far, far away, on a high hill-top, stood a castle, and as they neared it, Jerry felt the little figure on his arm tremble with suppressed emotion. Presently she stopped, then sank against a tree.

"Oh, Master Jerry." She covered her face; then with a wild sob, and flinging her hands from her, burst into a torrent of words. The soft voice, the quiet English accents were gone; instead was a harsh outpouring of Scotch.

"It's my ain countree, my ain bonnie mountains, my ain hame. And see—yonder's the glen with the lone tarn. Ah, wae's me—wae's me—for the lang, lang years gang by; for the sin, and the suffering, and the sorrow."

She covered her face again, rocking gently to and fro. Jerry would have said some words of comfort, but she put him quietly away, smoothed a few straggling tresses of hair

from her forehead and started again. And now the road left the level, cutting round the mountain side, leaving the building at the top for a time unseen. Suddenly, with the last turn, they came upon it. Four-square it stood, battlemented, turretted; a bridge, taking the place, no doubt, of the ancient drawbridge, wide and gravelled, to match the road, led under a great arched opening, with windows above, to the courtyard.

In the hush of the afternoon their footsteps fell on the old pavement, stirring the echoes and bringing one or two curious heads to the windows. Margery took no notice but went steadily on. Thinking that perhaps some of her relatives were employed inside, Jerry stopped and suggested waiting while she did her business, but grasping his arm firmly she shook her head and made straight for the main entrance.

White-faced, half-frightened, she pulled the hanging bell chain. Clang—clang. The silence broke up; some startled birds, feeding in the courtyard, rose with a rustle of wings; footsteps came nearer, the heavy door opened wide. An old man stood in the entrance, frowning as he gazed at the little, poorly clothed figure. He stepped forward and pointed a finger across the courtyard—

"Hae ye no sense o' decency, woman?" he began. "Yon door's for the likes o' ye." She lifted her eyes to his and her voice rang clear.

"Dinna ye ken me, Dougal McTavish? Hae ye forgotten Margery Lisle?"

"Margery Lisle," he repeated slowly, gazing silently at the upturned face, cautiously scanning every feature; remembrance slowly returning, "Margery Lisle," he said again; "I never thoucht to set eyes again on ye, Margery. Wha hae ye been these lang years?"

"A mony miles fra bonnie Scotland," replied Margery. "An' noo, Dougal, I'm for seein' the laird."

"The laird." He held up his hands in astonished protest. "Was ever the likes? Hoots, woman, I darena disturb him

at this hour. He's sleepin'." Margery moved up a step till she stood on the same level as the old retainer.

"A've a message for the laird, Dougal," she said solemnly. "A message frae the dead tae the livin', it'll no wait any longer." The old man looked distressed.

"I darena, woman, 'twould cost me ma place, I'm thinkin'."

"An' I darena leave it, Dougal," replied Margery sternly. "Will ye be takin' the message?" He shook his head.

"I darena." For answer she pushed him aside.

"Then I'll gae mysel', Dougal McTavish; I ken the way—'tis no the first time I've been here. Let me gang."

"Stay, woman—ye canna gang. If needs be," he added slowly, "I'll tak the message mysel'." She stepped back.

"Then awa wi' ye, Dougal McTavish, an' tell the laird Margery Lisle's for speakin' wi' him. An' tell him she brings a message fra one he loved. An' tell him," her voice rang clear and triumphant, "tell him she's kept her trust, an' that wi' her comes Gervaise Ross, the young Laird o' Ardelimar. Tell him that, Dougal McTavish."

The old man's face was a sight; amazement, dim remembrance struggling out of the past, caution and fear, kept him silent. Margery stamped her foot peremptorily.

"Will ye no gang?" she cried angrily. He nodded.

"Aye—I'm gangin'." She waved her hand onward.

"Then awa wi' ye." He shuffled slowly off.

"Waken the laird at this hour! Dougal, Dougal, the woman's mad."

Margery watched him across the dim black and white paved entrance hall, watched, till he passed through the heavy curtains screening the inner hall; then turned and sank into a chair, white and shaking. Bewildered, slightly annoyed at the turn things had taken, Jerry whispered a few words—

"Margery, tell me what it means; let me wait outside." She held his arm.

"No, sir, no—bide quiet—ye'll be hearin' gran' news. I'm no mad, sir—I ken ma wark." He stepped back with a shrug,

letting her have her way; at the worst it could only mean a somewhat ignominious exit and a journey back to London.

There was a long, long silence; a clock ticked gravely somewhere, the hush of thick carpets, of yard-deep walls, of noiseless servants, the hush only known in wealthy dwellings, was over all. Footsteps sounded somewhere far off. Margery rose, adjusted her bonnet with trembling fingers, smoothed her shawl, repinned it with the agate brooch which was a part of herself, and stood in expectant silence. The footsteps came nearer, they were behind the curtain, a voice—and something stirred in Jerry—sounded querulously.

"You're mad, Dougal—mad—waking me at this time, and bringing me here with some cock-and-bull story."

The curtain was lifted, a glimpse caught of Dougal standing straight and statue-like. Someone passed through, the curtain dropped. Margery curtseyed, curtseyed again and again, as a little old gentleman, thin, alert, with a frown on his face, came forward.

"What is it? What do you want?" he asked impatiently. "I'm not accustomed to see people at this hour. You are strangers, perhaps, and do not know my ways. Dougal told me someone wanted me on important business." Margery curtseyed again, then stood upright.

"Aye, laird—'tis urgent business. Sir—" she stepped nearer, "hae ye forgotten Margery Lisle?"

"Margery Lisle!" He turned instinctively for support to a solid oak chair; Jerry saw his face change.

"Margery Lisle," he repeated slowly. "You are she?"

"Aye, laird."

"Then—then—" the thin gnarled fingers caught convulsively at the carving. Margery went on calmly:

"I've a message, laird; a message fra my dear, dead master."

"Dead, Margery?" The fingers relaxed, the slight form dropped heavily to the chair; he covered his face.

"Dead—dead; my boy—my boy—and yet—I knew it—I've

known it always." Margery waited; presently he took his hands away—the face was drawn with pain.

"I've messages, laird, a mony, but there's one," she half turned to Jerry, standing between them, "one message he left in my charge, a trust. Laird, it's a grandson I'm bringin' ye, it's the young laird, Gervaise Ross o' Ardelimar."

Jerry started forward. The words heard before had passed unnoticed; now they conveyed their meaning. The laird rose from his seat, his face ashen grey, and seized her wrist.

"Woman," he cried hoarsely, "have a care; if you're telling me a lie—"

"It's no lie, sir," she replied earnestly. "Oh, laird, let me tell my tale; it's a lang ane, an' a sorrowful—but there's hope an' happiness mingled wi' it." He dropped her hand, forbearing to glance at Jerry, and turned slowly.

"I'll hear it," he said. "Come, follow me."

He led the way, courteously holding the curtain for Margery to pass under, leaving it in Jerry's hand to drop. As he turned to follow, remembrance again struck, turning him giddy, almost as a bodily blow. The hall, vast and dim, the great fireplaces piled with logs, the oaken screens and settles, the high stained windows, were alike familiar. He remembered, and his heart sank. No real place this, only one of books—of the book bought long ago. Giving it a long look, recalling his childish love, he hurried after the others.

Through another door, into a gallery of pictured men and women he went; a table stood under a great window, and the late afternoon sun shining down on it fell on something gleaming white. Margery saw it first. Flinging up her arms with a wild gesture, she sank on her knees, fumbling for the wooden rosary which hung at her waist.

"Mother of God," she cried, "dear lady, blessed saints in Heaven be praised; it's the 'Pan.'"

Her head fell, the shaking fingers moved over the beads, her lips struggled tremulously in prayer. The old man stood

silently watching, his face working with emotion. Suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Master Jerry, sir, the relic! Quick—oh, quick!"

With some dim understanding he felt inside his collar and drew up the ribbon on which hung the packet. Margery caught at it, broke the seal, but her fingers failed; she looked up at Jerry, the tears streaming down her face. The laird stood by, his shaking hands stroking down his lips as though to keep them from trembling. Jerry undid the knots and returned the bag. Margery felt inside and drew out a tiny parcel.

"Keep it, sir." She handed it to Jerry. "It's Father Andrew's relic, and it has kept the other these years."

The second try produced a small gilt key, and she rose solemnly, passing to the other side of the table. The laird watched with hungry eyes as she searched among the marble leaves and grasses of the bank, then breathed a little sigh of thankfulness. The two men drew close and closer, till each was conscious of the other's proximity. Cunningly hidden among the work was a tiny keyhole; Margery inserted the key, turned it, and the god moved slowly round, his laughing face towards them, disclosing a narrow aperture, in which lay an envelope.

The laird put out a trembling hand and Margery fell back; for the inscription on it was, "To my dear father."

Oh, the piteousness of the old face, the sudden look of age; Jerry's heart went out, and, as with a simultaneous thought, the laird came to him, putting the letter inside his breast pocket; the reading of it was for no other eyes.

"His son? Margery, is it true? Is this my grandson?"

"It's true, sir, true."

"Gervaise, my boy's boy. Let me look at you."

He led him to the window, scrutinising every feature, stroking the big brown hands.

"Yes, yes; he has his father's look, and yet—" he frowned. Margery finished the sentence.

"Yes, laird, he's like his mother, who's safe in heaven with the saints—she was one before she died. Oh, sir, she was the sweetest, bonniest wife that ever man had; never a better woman lived than my dear mistress, even if she was but a village lass, and my young master thought the world well lost for her."

"Yes, Margery. I've known it for many a year; I've repented bitterly, and I've paid the price."

"Ye have that, laird," replied Margery simply. "And now the past's past; 'tis the present and future ye'll live for."

"I will, so help me God," answered the old man solemnly. "Grandson Gervaise—give me your arm; and Margery, come with us; we'll hear the tale of the past."

The wonder of it all, the story of a love, long since given and returned, still living somewhere; the sorrow—the pain of those bygone days. Trouble, repentance, happiness, hope, wound in and out like threads of black, grey, and gold, and Jerry understood his father's work. For in the face of the god was nature itself—inscrutable, mocking, cruel, yet full of love and gentleness, joy and gladness. And as the tale was told, he knew that life repeated itself, that love is ever the same. As his father loved, so he too loved—so, in the ages past had men loved, and in the generations to come nature's song would still be—"I love you—I love you—for ever—for ever."

They sat till the afternoon sun fell behind the mountains, but Margery's tale was not all told.

"Yourself, woman—" said the laird peremptorily. "Tell us of yourself." She resisted long; at length she dropped her head on her hands, weeping, and with the tears the bitterness was swept away. She raised her head and told them in a few words—

"Sir, they took us—one moonlight night, on the prairie. They killed the men and children, and took the women prisoners. The younger ones—" She shivered and put her hands before her eyes, as though to shut out the past. "Laird—laird

—with my own hands I shot my young sister. It was his last word as he was struck down, and she begged me to let her follow him. We older ones, they kept, as—slaves. For years we worked and toiled, travelling with them, seeing fearful sights. Laird, they're written in my heart till the last trump shall sound, till I see my dear ones again. A year ago we came to a city; I was old—almost useless—and perhaps they did not keep so strict a watch. Anyhow, I escaped, and made my way to English people; they helped me, but they were poor, and could only give me sufficient to keep me from starvation till I reached a port. It took me many weeks, and when I got there I found a boat had just left, and there were many days to wait. Earning a little here and there, and working my passage home by attending to two ladies, we reached Liverpool, but—I was—penniless, and—" the tears streamed down; she wiped them away and smiled wanly—"laird, Master Jerry, will you ever forgive me? I begged my way—an' —an'—when I reached London—I was—starving. Sirs—" she spoke quickly, "that's my tale; it's told. The past's past. Never speak of it again." The laird said nothing; only he rose, and stooping, took the little withered hand in his and raised it to his lips. Jerry caught her to him.

"Margie, Margie, my dear Margie." So the evening came. Dougal brought lamps; the laird rose.

"Gervaise, there are clothes of your father's—old fashioned, perhaps, but we are so ourselves. Come with me."

They clothed him in those clothes of bygone days, which after all, were not so vastly different; the black satin breeches, the silk stockings and diamond buckled shoes, the cut-away coat and smart waistcoat, the frilled shirt, the high cravat, and Jerry, looking at himself in the long pier glass, suddenly realised his position. The pride of race was upon him; no more would he envy the slight elegance of Francis Crewe, his own was a sterner breed. Strength, breadth, height, were his heritage, and he gloried in them. Mary—again the thrill of realisation—he could marry her, he was her equal, to woo

and win, despite the convent. And with a new dignity he went down to dinner, served that night in the great banqueting chamber, with a magnificence unknown for years.

"'Tis a grand day," said Dougal to Andrew, the laird's own man; "for the heir's come hame to his ain, and there'll likely be merrymaking, an' feasting, and wha kens the end? —maybe a wedding feast."

Margery, clad in a black silk gown lent by the housekeeper, sorely against her will, obeyed the peremptory command of the laird that she should dine with them, and though the meal went almost untasted by two of the three—Jerry's healthy appetite was proof against even such wonders—it was a happy time, though tempered by sad remembrance.

Sleep was long coming that night, even to Jerry. In the morning the laird took him round the picture gallery, finding likenesses here and there. Of the letter he said nothing—not till many years after did Jerry see it—but he spoke of an enclosure.

"Your mother's marriage certificate was there, Gervaise; the only link wanted to establish your identity."

The days slipped by. Then Jerry, anxious, in spite of all the new found grandeur, to get back, formed a plan. Romance had come, romance should be kept. He laughed gaily as he formed it. The laird listened, frowning, as he begged leave to go.

"The sittings," he exclaimed haughtily; "what are they to the future Laird of Ardelimar?" Jerry mentioned no names; it was part of the plan, only begged, finally insisting.

"Grandfather, I must go. I promised." Fate helped him, for that same day came a letter from Toby. It contained very little, but that little was insistent.

"Jerry," it said, "come back; for the sake of one you love —of your friend, to save me, come back. You must be in this house not later than half-past seven on the evening of the thirtieth of October—earlier, if you please, but no later, or

all will be lost. You will find instructions with Reuben, obey them implicitly. I know I can trust you."

It was a strange letter, but it gave the final touch. Reluctantly the laird yielded to his entreaties.

"But you'll come back, grandson," he cried, almost piteously; "I'm alone, quite alone; and you're my all, you know." Jerry answered quickly.

"Of course I'll come back, grandfather, but I want you to keep it secret till then. Don't let it be public till my birthday. If Margery hadn't been so afraid of something happening, you know we shouldn't have come yet; so please, grandfather, keep it till then." Wondering, but holding it as a bribe to bring him back, the old man promised.

"We'll have great doings on your birthday, grandson Gervaise. And then you shall come home to your rightful place and learn the management of an estate, the ways and manners of a great nobleman; for you'll be the head of one of the oldest families in Scotland, Gervaise; few can take precedence of Ross of Ardelimar." And then Jerry put a question which had been in his mind for some days.

"Grandfather, Gervaise is not a Scotch name—how came it into our"—oh, the delight of the pronoun—"family?"

The laird's face lit up. "Grandson, the question is well put. Long ago, when Mary Stuart left her native land for her husband's, she took with her certain nobles, Ross of Ardelimar being one. When she returned, they came with her, remaining faithful to her through the unhappy years. A child was born, to whom our queen stood sponsor, giving it the name Gervaise; which name has descended to the eldest child, for, failing a son, Ardelimar descends through daughters, in memory of that most persecuted and sainted lady."

To stories such as these Jerry could have listened for ever, for the sense of lineage and rank was strong within him. But for that other love which called him, which would have called him from heaven, he would have found it hard to

tear himself away. As it was, he dreamed dreams in which he was the narrator and his listener a maiden, fair as that other maiden of long ago, whose presence would wake the sleeping castle to life.

The laird's ideas of travelling were confined to a carriage with his own outriders, and relays of horses sent on beforehand. Failing that, to post in the ordinary way. But Jerry would have neither; they would return as they came. A compromise was effected, and they drove to Edinburgh in state, accompanied by the laird, stayed the night, and catching the early coach, set out on the homeward way, secrecy being observed according to Jerry's wishes.

CHAPTER IX

OF BLACK CLOUDS AND SHADOWS

MANY a time in after life did Mrs. Chubbe look back on those October days and chide herself for lack of insight. "I must ha' been a fool," she would say, "not to know that o'er much gaiety covers a sore heart. 'Twas the same wi' my Lady Mima; tho' to be sure, her heart was sore only wi' the thoughts o' leavin' her home—there was true love there—an' that our Betty never had for him," she would add fiercely—"not so much as would cover a fourpenny bit."

But at the time, Betty's gay laughter and sunny smiles roused all the pride and love in Martha Chubbe's heart. The farmer's admiration knew no bounds. Never a market day passed but some fairing returned with him, nothing was too good, and on the day before she was to go to Mrs. Plumtre's her uncle produced from his capacious pocket a small parcel.

He watched her open it, looking for the sparkling light in her eyes, eager for the quick embrace, the words of thanks, the warm kisses. He waited in vain. Betty slowly untied the string, lifted the lid from the cardboard box, and with a brief glance at the pretty gold locket and chain within, flung it on a table, and flying to the ready arms, laid her head on his shoulder and burst into passionate sobs.

"Betty, Betty, lass—what's amiss wi' it?" asked the astonished farmer, a little hurt at the turn things had taken. Betty sobbed out her answer—

"Oh, uncle Matt—it's—it's—not that. It's lovely—much too good. Oh, you're so good—so kind—and—I'm a—wicked girl." He soothed her gently; Mrs. Chubbe, watching in astonishment, chimed in.

"The child's tired, master; she's had a long day—butter wouldn't come this morning, and she's excited at going on a visit. Come, Betty girl, 'tain't like you to cry for nothing." The gentle tone, coming from her aunt, only made matters worse. The farmer let her cry quietly on, gently stroking the bright hair. For once Mrs. Chubbe was perplexed, and left things to her husband.

"The change'll do her good," she murmured, as she ironed nightcaps and pocket handkerchiefs, to be packed presently —"an' when she comes back, I'll gi' her a thorough good dose o' bark; it's the autumn weather."

The tears exhausted, Betty cried no more, only quietly resting against her uncle's broad shoulder. She packed the little box ready for the morning, undressed, and lay down for the last time in the little white bed, and with sleepless eyes, stared out at the deep, dark sky. "Lady Crewe"—the name brought comfort of a kind; were it not for leaving her uncle and aunt, she would be perfectly happy, she told herself. He loved her, how could she help loving him; he was so good, so kind. Of course, she loved him. "I do—I do—" she repeated convincingly—"of course I do; why, I'm going to marry him, that means I love him." With which sophistry she turned over and shut her eyes.

But sleep was not for that night. She rose early—dawdled over her dressing; the minutes seemed hours. Was all ready? She went over plans, there was no weak place. The letter written to Mrs. Plumtre had appointed the following day; she had persuaded her uncle to let her go with David the carrier, instead of taking him from his work. Yes, all was in order. Good-byes were said, last injunctions, and the lumbering waggon jogged away, the first step taken towards the brilliant future. What with delivery of goods and commissions taken on the way it was two o'clock before the carrier pulled up before a little wayside inn. Here she determined to alight. In the course of conversation she had managed

to convey to David's mind the fact that she was spending the night with a friend in the town, and would go on to Mrs. Plumtre's the next day. The implied falsehood went sorely against Betty's proud nature, but having begun she would not falter. The little bag containing immediate necessities heightened the impression, and without suspicion her box was delivered at the Swan.

Skirting the town—for acquaintances might be encountered and awkward questions asked—she crossed fields and lanes, finally coming out on the highway the other side of Channington. Her heart beat wildly; another few minutes and her fate was sealed. There was still time. She hesitated, half turned, then a cloud of dust moved in the far distance. Nearer it came—nearer; she shrank into the grassy sideway; the cloud of dust moved onwards, resolving itself into a travelling carriage, quiet and neat. Someone was looking out of the window, and her heart bounded with relief. Jerry—all her doubts were silenced; then something unfamiliar struck her; this was a stranger, and her heart sank. The carriage stopped; its occupant got out and came towards her, hat in hand.

"Miss Betty Chubbe, I believe." She bowed her head to hide the tears of disappointment.

"My name is Dingle—Toby Dingle. Sir Francis Crewe sent me. Our friend, Mr. Jerry Dell, is out of town and was unable to come; he sent this letter." Betty snatched the folded sheets from him; those fateful words of which Jerry, travelling post haste from the north, knew nothing. Toby, his heart bursting with impotent anguish and remorse, watched the changing face. She folded the letter and stood upright.

"He says I am to trust you implicitly; and that he will meet me at Sir Francis' house, and take me to his friend's for the night. Is that so?" Toby inclined his head—he had no words.

"Then—in that case—I will come." He held the door while

she stepped in; the horses' heads were turned, and with swift movement they started on the journey which was to bring fortune and wealth, and, best of all, revenge, to Betty.

Along the great north road the mail coach took its accustomed way, heedless of the impatience of one of its passengers. They were due in London at seven o'clock; plenty of time if all went well; but to Jerry it seemed that everything combined for delay. A few minutes lost in starting was gained; a slight accident to a wheel detained them, but by six o'clock time was made up, and St. Clement's struck seven as they clattered into the yard of the Bell and Crown in Holborn.

He called a hackney coach, hustled Margery in, and giving directions to drive like fury, got in himself, and listened to a severe reprimand on the extravagance of spending when unnecessary. Reuben was expecting them; someone else waiting in the hall seized him and drew him in.

"Paul—you—"

"Yes, yes; don't ask questions, Jerry; answer them. What does this mean?" He drew out a letter. "Listen: 'Come at once—at once, if you still love her. Come and save her. Go to the house in the square and wait till half-past seven; then to Sir Francis Crewe's by nine—not earlier. Down a side alley is a small door, the key of which you will get from Reuben Gade. Enter, and leave the door unbarred. Upstairs—you may perhaps know it—is the great drawing-room. Here you will find Sir Francis; keep him engaged till I come. All will be explained.' What does it mean, Jerry—tell me?"

But Jerry had no explanation. Silently Reuben handed him a letter. The handwriting was the same, the directions similar; it seemed that the writer feared that one or other should fail. They looked at each other, and simultaneously came the words: "We'll go together."

"The key, Reuben." Paul held out his hand and glanced at the clock.

"Plenty of time," answered Jerry.

"Plenty of time!" echoed Paul savagely. "Time! you can talk of time when each minute may mean a minute nearer to death—or worse. Time!" He paced up and down fiercely. "Ah, Jerry, it's plain you don't know what love is. Oh, my love, my love—my Betty; what devil's work has been played on us?"

"Betty!" Jerry echoed in astonishment, "Betty!" Paul turned furiously.

"Betty, of course; who else should it be?" A vague explanation of many things trembled at the back of Jerry's mind. Little incidents came back, trifles which had puzzled him slightly, and with them mistrust of Toby. Paul, fuming helplessly, watched the clock, finally snatching his hat and cloak.

"Come, Jerry, we'll walk—walk till it's time to go in. I can't wait longer. We can talk as we go."

Even if Jerry had wanted to tell his news it would have been impossible. He had to listen to the tale of misery, hopeless love, duplicity—and his heart sank fathoms deep as reluctantly, yet instinctively, he knew that Toby had been false. In vain he tried to explain away things. Knowing Betty, he thought she might have been tempted by wealth, position.

"I've written to her, Jerry—written, written—till only a heart of stone could have resisted. Only last week I sent to her, begging her to think twice before she married him; for he's bad, Jerry, bad as hell holds them."

"We'll save her yet, Paul—never fear," cried Jerry hopefully. "Cheer up, man, things will come right." Paul groaned in reply. They were turning west; the river, under a dark sky, gleamed dimly.

"Jerry, if she's false," he whispered, waving a hand towards it, "that remains for me. If we're too late, then, death for him."

Past the quiet, stately abbey, past bright houses, gay with voices and laughter, they went. Paul looked at his watch,

it wanted half an hour, and he groaned impatiently. Jerry took his arm and drew him sharply onwards.

"A quarter of an hour out," he said, "and a quarter back, or nearly—and keep up your courage, Paul, dear old fellow." So those last minutes, each an eternity, were lived through.

Leo House was bright with light; the long line of windows on the upper floor glared like yellow eyes into the peaceful darkness and waving trees in the gardens. Outside all was quiet, inside, the stillness was more apparent. Not a footstep fell, not a whisper echoed. The great hall, garish with its gold and red and white, was silent as the grave. The statue of Mirth laughed dumbly as it caught reflections of ruddy things; no footmen dawdled at the doors, no flutter of a woman servant's skirts stirred the echoes. The house was empty, save for its master.

In the long drawing-room, Francis Crewe waited impatiently. The cards were played, another half hour and the game was his. He glanced at his watch, muttered an imprecation on the slow moving hands, and throwing open a window, gazed up and down the dark pavement.

"Damn the fellow!" he cried savagely, "will he never come?" then fell to pacing the room from end to end, and back again. The long gilt mirrors reflected the slender, agile figure clad in evening attire; the polished floor, inlaid with pale coloured woods, echoed to the light footsteps. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, now stopping to look at his watch, or the gilt and ormolu clock on a marble and gilt side table—now, with shaking hands, to pour out and drink a glass of wine.

The pointers of the timepiece moved slowly on. Suddenly a sound roused him; a sound so slight that, but for the ghostly stillness, it would have passed unnoticed. He stopped and turned quickly to the door, a smile on his face. She had come—Toby had not failed him. But the smile died, giving place to a fierce expression of anger as it opened, and the woman, veiled in her outdoor draperies, stood before him. He strode towards her.

"Hester—what brings you here?"

"What should bring me here?" she returned evasively, disengaging herself from the black cloak and veil. "I come, as usual, Francis—for love of you."

"Pshaw!" he retorted angrily. "I told you not to come to-night; I am expecting company."

"Yes." She looked him full in the face. With a stride he was upon her, seizing her by her wrists.

"Then how dare you disobey my orders—how dare you?" She stood calm, and her voice was steady.

"I wished to see for myself what sort of company it is which is too good for my presence, yet which comes at night without stir of carriages or servants, stealthily—even as I myself come." He gripped her till the marks of his fingers were left.

"And by what right do you pry into my affairs—against my express commands? What right, I ask, what right?" Again she answered full and strong.

"By the right of love, Francis. By the love you swore to me—I swore to you. Francis, Francis—" She lifted her face to him, its passionate darkness turning to soft tenderness. "Tell me you love me still—tell me there is no other woman—tell me that, Francis—swear it to me." He saw his chance, and loosening his hold, smiled down at her.

"I swear it, Hester, by our love. There is no other woman."

"It is not enough." She stood straight before him. "Swear again—by God in Heaven—if there is one?" Far, far away, his keen ear caught the sound of wheels. To get her away—out of the house. He smiled again, humouring her.

"By God in Heaven, Hester, I swear."

"May I die if it is false."

"Oh," impatiently, "may I die if it is false." She flung him from her with a cry.

"False, false—I know all. She is coming to-night—even now. And I may go where I came from." The far away sound grew nearer; in desperation he turned fiercely.

"Yes—it is true. I love her—as I never loved you—as I never loved before." She flung up her arms with a wild sorrowful cry.

"False—false. False to your love—to me—to her. But she shall never be yours, Francis. Never—never—never. Take back your oath."

She flung herself upon him. There was a glint of steely blue—a thick choking sound. She stood upright; a smile of fierce triumph on her face as she watched him reel and twist, then fall heavily to the ground. The distant sound came nearer; nearer still, the echo of hurrying footsteps.

The clocks of Westminster were striking nine as the two men turned in at the little door in the alley. Silent, unseen, a shadow raised itself from its lurking place beneath the wall. Behind them, through the unlocked door it passed, slipping through dark passages into the brilliant hall, where it slunk into a corner.

Up the gilded staircase, along the crimson corridor they hurried, some subtle instinct telling of evil things doing. Paul threw open the door and burst in, then fell back in utter dismay. Francis Crewe lay on the ground; beside him knelt a woman, weeping bitterly.

"My love—my love—" they heard her say. "Francis, wake —I did not mean it." She lifted herself from him at the sound of the door opening, gazing passionately at the still features, handsome, even in death; then sprang to her feet with a piercing cry.

"He's dead—dead. He'll never speak to me again." She turned like a fury to the two men. "And it's you—" she cried to Paul, "you—his enemy—who has caused this. He would have killed you had he lived. He is dead. His work is left to me."

It was so quick, so sudden, that before they realised it she was upon him; the little dagger gleamed in her lifted hand and fell—but Jerry was there first. Glancing from

Paul's heart it entered at the shoulder, and with a groan he sank backwards. Jerry caught him, undecided whether to arrest her progress or attend to him. But while he hesitated there came a sound of wheels in the street below, a quick rush of footsteps, Toby's voice, another—the door flew open and Betty sprang in.

"Jerry! oh, Jerry!" then with a look of unutterable dismay, "Oh, what is it?" Her eye caught the prostrate form of Francis Crewe; she moved quickly forward, then saw the other, and with a cry of anguish, threw herself upon him.

"Paul, Paul—oh, my dearest. Paul—wake up. He's not dead," she turned wildly, "Oh, say he's not dead." Jerry lifted her from him.

"Betty, dear, he's not dead—but you mustn't excite him. Toby," he turned to the figure in the doorway, "run quickly for a doctor."

Toby turned, but a voice cold and clear came:

"Before you go you had better take what belongs to you."

For the moment she had been forgotten; now all eyes were turned to her. Betty lifted her frightened face; Jerry for the fraction of a second ceased to stanch the wound in Paul's side; and Toby, his features tense with emotion, faced her as she stood, half-veiled and with a mocking smile, holding out a paper she had taken from a small steel box. Trembling, falteringly, he drew near, forgetful of all save that small thing which meant life. Seizing it, for one short moment he swayed, then caught at a piece of furniture, nerving himself to tear open the fatal sheet.

"At last—at last," they heard him murmur, "thank God for freedom." Quickly he stepped to the fireplace, threw the paper in, and for a moment watched it char, blaze up, and die into ashes. Then he turned with a great sigh.

"Jerry, I'm free now to go; I'll fetch a doctor. But she must go unharmed; she's saved me, I cannot hurt her. Her crime is nothing to mine. Let her go, Jerry." Before Jerry

could answer he was gone. They heard his hurrying footsteps pass down the stairs out into the square. Hester turned to Betty, still with that mocking, cynical smile.

"There are letters in the box which may concern Miss Betty Chubbe; or—perhaps—" the smile was worthy of Francis Crewe, "the count may find them interesting reading when he recovers."

Betty started forward to where the little box stood on a table. Absorbed in her task of collecting those fatal letters —how poor and despicable they seemed now—she took no notice of the other woman. Jerry, watching his friend, doing what he could till Toby returned, roused only at the sound of a door closing softly. He looked up, then sprang to his feet.

"Betty, take my place—quick! I don't understand—I don't know how she came here, but she mustn't go like that."

He was out of the room just in time to see her glide swiftly down the great staircase, a black spot in the glaring brightness.

Swift, like a ghost she passed—silent, down the red-flecked marble steps. At the bottom, for one brief second, she paused, and lifting the veil, turned her scornful face with its mocking smile upward to where he, too, paused. For one instant tragedy and sorrow peeped from behind the mask, then the veil dropped, and she crossed the hall. But, intercepting her, with a swifter movement than her own, from the shadow which lay behind the laughing figure of Mirth, another shadow sprang into life. She threw up her arms, her wild scream rang out, but before Jerry could gain the hall, it was upon her—black shadows mingling. The report of a pistol woke the stillness, echoes rushed from their lurking places, shadows stirred fantastically on the walls. But that other shadow, flinging its arms with a familiar gesture which made the watcher cry out at the sudden explanation, fled noiselessly through dim, narrow passages to the alley door, Jerry after him. Out into the square it passed, crying as it ran:

"Vengeance—vengeance is mine—mine. Vengeance on murderers and evil-doers—on harlots and adulterers. Vengeance on this great city of Babylon—this wicked city, where the Scarlet Woman sits enthroned. Destroy it, Lord—Lord, destroy it. Send down thy vengeance. Mine is accomplished."

On they flew, pursuer and pursued. Toby and the doctor, entering the square, stood aghast at the flying figures; panting, Jerry could only utter the word—"Hurry."

Through the dark streets, mingling with their occupants, the ranting voice upraised, its owner only by some miracle escaping capture. On—on—Jerry hardly gaining, so swift was the flying form. Its cry came back to him, borne on the night air—"Vengeance—vengeance, Lord—mine is accomplished."

Past the abbey—with a sudden turn southward to where the river ran slow, sluggishly gleaming under leaden skies. With a perception of what was coming, Jerry put out almost superhuman strength, but to no purpose. The black form was on the bridge; for a moment it paused and turned its face; a gleam of light from the sullen sky shone full upon it, showing it ghastly white save where the purple mark glowed dully. With a quick leap to the parapet it flung its arms upwards in wild gesture, crying loudly, "Vengeance—vengeance, Lord—mine and thine."

A leap—a splash in the dark waters, and Simeon Padden sank, never to rise again.

Three days later, the river, refusing to bear the burden, washed him ashore on the low lying marshy land at its mouth.

Pushing his way through the crowd, which gathers to an event as flies to a honey pot, Jerry hurried back. The action had been so quick that it wanted only a quarter to ten when he once more passed through the door in the alley.

The house was no longer hushed. On the red-flecked marble floor were redder stains still, but the huddled mass of black had vanished. She lay in an upper room, the stormy passions at rest, the scornful face composed and rigid in its last sleep.

Downstairs officials talked in whispers; a constable, taking notes, strode from one to the other, and an excited group of servants, recalled by that strange scent of something unusual, crowded together in the background. As Jerry entered there was a sudden rush towards him, but, exerting his strength, he threw them off and fled upwards to the drawing-room, followed by the constable.

Here, too, were changes. Someone had thrown a sheet over the dead body, which lay where it had fallen, and the doctors stood by, gravely conferring. Paul had been lifted to a couch, and the first doctor was stooping over him administering something in a spoon. Betty, at the foot of the couch, watched with drawn face and frightened eyes, but she made no sound. The big bonnet had fallen behind her neck, and the ruddy hair, escaping from its pins, curled and twined about her shoulders. Toby, near her, was silent too. But as Jerry entered, things stirred; Betty's face changed, she flew to him. He was assailed by a storm of questions, only Toby was silent.

With the mystery of Betty's presence unexplained he stood bewildered, answering mechanically, vainly endeavouring to see light. Gradually the excitement subsided; the sergeant, peeping through the window, shut his note-book with a snap; there was the sound of carriage wheels in the square; they stopped, Paul was carried down, and placed carefully on a mattress; Jerry, drawing Betty with him, got in, while Toby and the sergeant followed in a hackney coach.

Without questioning, Jerry directed the men to Reuben's, and the little cavalcade, surrounded by a curious crowd, took its slow way homewards. He would have gone forward to break the news, but the Jew was standing at the door, watching anxiously the entrance to the square. He hurried out with uplifted hands.

"Gott in Himmell—what haf we here?"

They lifted the wounded man out and carried him into

Margery's room, Reuben assisting and waiting patiently for explanations. There were others who also waited, but it was not until long past midnight that the doctor left, assuring them of recovery, and the house regained some of its usual restfulness. Margery, a self-constituted nurse, was left, and the others returned to the hall, where the Jew brewed coffee, and Toby put together a hasty meal.

"And now we will hear all," cried Reuben, with whom childlike curiosity was a characteristic. At the words, Betty flung herself against Jerry and burst into tears.

"Oh, Jerry—Jerry—it's all my fault. Oh—I'm a bad—wicked girl—I shall never be happy again. Never—never."

He soothed her gently, and gradually the story, her part of it, came out. The three men listened, Jerry frowning angrily, Reuben with troubled face, and Toby still silent, his head bent, his features in shadow.

"Jerry, I can never go back. I could never be seen in Cloudesley again." For a minute all were quiet. Reuben spoke:

"Jerry, mein yongling, you must start early and post to Cloudesley; it will be some hours before they are anxious, and you will perhaps be first, and, so there need be no trouble—no shame. This yong maiden will go with you." But Betty started up and flew to him:

"No, no, oh, please, Mr. Gade, keep me here a little while; I couldn't go yet." He smiled kindly at her.

"Well, well, we will see; you shall not go if you want not. Jerry shall make everything right." In her quick impulsive way Betty threw her arms round him and kissed him, winning the Jew's heart again, as she had won it many times before in his pedlar days. "But there are still many things to explain," said Reuben, with a glance towards the huddled figure.

"Yes, many," said Jerry, sternly. "Toby, we want an explanation." He raised his head. In spite of the haggard,

worn look, the thin face, there was a look of rest, of fear removed. He leaned his elbow on the table, supporting his cheek on his hand.

"I will tell you; I have always wanted to, but the risk was too great. You would never have betrayed me, but you might have scorned me; and now—now—" the voice broke slightly, "it is harder than I thought for." He paused. "You know the beginning, Jerry, you know who I am. So does Reuben now, but you don't know all. Long after I left home I got into trouble, in London. I was in service with Sir Francis Crewe, the late baronet. I owed five hundred pounds to a money-lender."

"Five hundred pounds!" repeated Jerry; the sum seemed incredible—a fortune; Toby moved impatiently.

"I know, I know; it seems a fortune. But in those days I didn't think so, I was young and reckless—and—" he paused again, "it meant losing my situation—losing all the ground I had regained, for—I meant to do better—to make up for the past. Sir Francis trusted me, and I," the voice dropped, "abused it, in an evil moment, a moment of temptation." Again a long silence. "You know now my gift of imitating handwriting—well—" The words came slowly, cautiously. "Some devil tempted me, and I yielded—I—" the air was tense with expectation—the listeners bent closer; the words were whispered, yet clearly they came on the stillness, "I—forged his name." They drew back with an instinctive glance round. Toby lifted his head and looked at them.

"Yes, scorn me if you like. Looking back, I scorn myself, my weakness. Directly it was done I realised the danger, but it was too late. I believe, had I gone straight to Sir Francis, he would have forgiven me, for he was a kind, good master, very different from—" he broke off. "While I hesitated, the opportunity passed. He died, as you know, suddenly, and his son succeeded. To my relief, the forged cheque was honoured, and the new baronet told me I could work it off, though

he said, 'Not in my service, Toby.' Well, he sent me away, and Reuben—" without thinking, he put out a hand, then drew it hastily away, but not before the Jew had caught it in a warm clasp—"Reuben took me, treated me as you know, and for some years I was happy. The cloud hung over my head, it is true. Every knock, every strange footstep made me tremble, but I trusted Sir Francis, I was full of gratitude for his goodness as I thought. Then, this spring, I knew his duplicity, I knew he only wanted me for his own purposes, that I might be his tool; never, never, would he set me free; the rope was round my neck—never would he lift it from me. He used me; I stole the letters. Jerry—Miss Chubbe—forgive me. I would have killed myself rather than do it, but, had I done so, he would have exposed my shame to the world, and my mother—" he broke down at last, holding his face in his hands. Betty stole softly round.

"Don't, don't," she whispered, drawing them away, "it's all over now, and because of you; for if you hadn't done it, someone else would, and then—oh, then—" It was her turn to cover her face; Jerry put out his hand and took Toby's.

"Toby, we can never thank you enough. As Betty says, suppose it had been someone else, we should never have known, and that villain—yes—" he rose hastily, overturning the chair in his anger, "yes—I will say it, though he's dead—he was a villain—a bad man—and he's dead, thank God—and can work no more evil. Toby, what you must have suffered. But it's over now, done with, and we shall be happy again—doubly happy," he added, thinking of the joyous secret he carried in his own breast.

"Yes," repeated Reuben solemnly, rising and standing behind the bowed figure, "yes, it's over now. We will start fresh." He stood silent, brooding with far-off gaze. Betty, beside him, slipped an arm through his; he patted the little hand in a fatherly way, then turned and looked down at the

beautiful face, gentle now, with lines which were not there before. He shook his head and sighed; then, as though throwing his thoughts into the past, drew himself up.

"Yes, we will be happy again; but we cannot be happy without health, and we cannot have health if we do not sleep. So away with you, Toby, good lad, away, mein yongling, and you, mein pretty one, go to your bed, and get the beauty sleep."

They left him smoking and drinking coffee by the fireside. Toby crept in to share Margery's watch, after sending Jerry to snatch an hour's rest before starting, and Betty, though begging hard to be allowed to take her share, was ordered to bed by the household generally.

In the quiet of her room, looking out to the narrow street, she knelt down and thought of the events of the day. It seemed months since she left Cloudesley. Was she the same Betty Chubbe who had waited in the high road? She rose and peeped in the glass, and though the features were the same, she knew that she herself had changed from a thoughtless child to a woman, knowing good and evil, conscious of a love in her heart which would last for ever; and she threw herself across the bed, sobbing. For although Paul's letters might have been intercepted, though the whole story might be false, there was still the fact that he had fought for Louise da Silva, and—the paper—the gossip of the town; ah—suppose it was true—suppose.

CHAPTER X

IN WHICH SHADOWS ARE SCATTERED AND DREAMS BECOME REALITIES

JERRY rose betimes; indeed, sleep had been but a name to everyone in the house. In spite of the events of the previous night, in spite of Paul lying half unconscious, in spite of all, the spirit of happiness was abroad that morning. Toby, coming from his room, wore an expression of care removed, and some of his old cheerfulness would out, for all his endeavours to look grave.

"Jerry, will you take me with you?" he said, then, with a different expression, "as far, that is, as Channington. I can't wait another day, I must see her. Miss Chubbe says she is just the same. I told her, you know," he added shamefacedly, then courageously, "as I shall tell everyone; not the whole"—the shadow of fear came back—"no, not even her, not yet at least. Ah, Jerry, there's a good time coming at last. So, if you'll have me, I'll go and get breakfast ready."

And Jerry heard his song, silent so long, break out—

> Too much care, will make a young ma-an turn grey,
> And too much care, will turn an old ma-an to clay.
> So begone, Dull Care; I prithee, bego-one from me,
> Begone, Dull Care; too long hast thou tarried with me.

He went in to Paul before starting. The wound, Margery told him, was slight, but the loss of blood had been great, owing, no doubt, to delay in fetching a doctor, and he was very weak indeed, hardly conscious.

"But there's no need to worrit, sir. Doctor says he's to be kept quiet; you go and comfort them poor things at Cloudesley; you can come back soon."

No fear about that. The sittings had been too long deferred as it was, and with the new hope in his heart and all obstacles removed, he determined to waste no time at Cloudesley, or anywhere, till he had seen her. Betty was left in charge of Reuben, and though she clung to Jerry with tearful messages, and injunctions not to shield her in any way, she would hear nothing of returning yet.

"And if you're tired of me, Mr. Gade, I'll get a situation in London." At which the Jew smiled down at her and patted the heaving shoulders.

"That will never be then; we shall not tire of you, pretty maiden." The old house was very quiet those two days. Betty flew round and work fell beneath her deft fingers; Reuben shared Margery's watch, but many times he would sigh and look round, as though expecting Toby's song or Jerry's serious face. He came back late next evening, Toby staying on a few days longer, when he, too, was to return and talk over the future with Reuben.

Betty, shy when it came to the hearing of home news, kept in the background for a time, till curiosity prevailed and she slipped into the chair by Jerry's side. Things had gone well; the news had not reached Cloudesley, and the farmer and his wife received it with equanimity, Jerry beginning at the wrong end and coming to Betty's escapade last. It is difficult to believe danger when it is over. Betty breathed a sigh of relief and danced off to prepare a meal.

"And Paul?" asked Jerry anxiously. "How is he?" Reuben knitted his brows thoughtfully.

"He is going well—yes—quite well; but he is not himself, he talks wildly, and—" he glanced round the room to assure himself that they were alone, "he will talk always of Miss Betty—and not kindly. He seems to know she is here. Sick folk have strange intuition, and he says always, 'Send her away—send her away—she does not love me,' and then with moch sorrow, 'Ah, Betty, Betty, you've killed me.' Ach, it is sad, but we will hope it will kom right. Yet," he frowned

thoughtfully, "if she would go for a while, if there was someone to go to—"

Betty solved the difficulty herself. The last sitting but one was on the following morning, and Jerry dressed as he had dressed that first morning, with trembling fingers and sick feeling at his heart—not this time with fear of failure, rather with the weight of overmuch happiness. For he knew she loved him even as he loved her, and neither convent walls nor her father's wrath, nor anything in Heaven or earth, could alter that. He could have sung with Toby that morning, for dull care was gone, the black cloud had lifted, the shadows had fled. Betty knocked at his door as he was coming out; her face was tear-stained, and she pushed him in, following after.

"Jerry," she whispered with a sob, "Paul doesn't want me; he doesn't know me, and—and—I want to go away—to-day —now." He stared at her, whistling softly in perplexity.

"There's Cloudesley, Betty." She stamped her foot angrily.

"I won't go to Cloudesley; I won't—I won't."

"Well, then," continued Jerry, still more puzzled, "where can you go?" She wiped her eyes, then, twisting her handkerchief nervously, looked up into his face:

"Jerry, you'll see Lady Mary to-day, won't you?" He nodded.

"Couldn't you—you know her so well—don't you?"

"Y-yes, pretty well." Her voice grew eager.

"Jerry, ask her, will you, to let me come to her, to be her maid for a time? She will, I'm sure." He was silent; Betty watched his face with pleading eyes. "Do, Jerry, do ask her." He had not hesitated from disinclination; Betty had always been a bond between them, the favour asked would draw it closer. He smiled down into the lovely expressive face. Betty gave him a hug and sighed a sigh of relief.

"And directly Paul is well enough, you'll let me come back, Jerry. Margery says 'perhaps'—but you'll make her, won't you?"

A thousand new feelings possessed him as he neared the house at Chelsea. The events of the past weeks were uppermost, and he could have laughed aloud from sheer lightheartedness. Only a short time more and he would throw away the swineherd's disguise and stand revealed, a prince offering homage to a princess. But patience—patience. As a swineherd he had loved her—as a swineherd she must love him; not for rank nor money, but for himself, and his heart sank, for he knew that in her eyes he was but a swineherd.

The work was nearly accomplished; one more day of happiness, and then—darkness perhaps, or—he hardly dared glance at the other side; such glorious joy, it seemed, could not be for mortals.

She greeted him as usual; but during the morning he caught her watching him with a wondering look, and knew that already his secret must have given him a different air. A curious coincidence occurred, paving the way for Betty's request. Towards the close of the sitting the governess rose and left the room. Mary explained.

"She is so good; my maid was taken ill suddenly yesterday, and until we get another, Miss Gilbert insists on doing everything for me—she is kindness itself."

Here was Jerry's chance. He poured out the tale, toning down Betty's flight to a sudden impulse to see London and himself. To one more experienced the tale might have seemed lame. Mary saw no flaw and clapped her hands with delight.

"How charming!" she cried. "Oh, Mr. Dell, tell her to come to me at once—this afternoon. I will send a carriage for her." And the governess's acquiescence being obtained, Betty became an inmate of the earl's house.

Count de Cosse had been sent for by Jerry, but several days would elapse before he could arrive. Paul, in the meanwhile, went on to recovery. It was the day after Betty's departure that consciousness returned; with it came memory and questions. In spite of Margery's admonitions Jerry an-

swered them, knowing that until he did so Paul would have no rest.

"I had such a strange fancy, Jerry," he said dreamily, "just before I lost my senses; it seemed that Betty came to me and—kissed me. I suppose it's because, in spite of all, I think of her always. I cannot put her from me." He turned his head quickly. "Did I dream that he was dead, Jerry?" The listener shook his head.

"No. He was wounded—by the same woman."

"Not dead, then. Ah," he sighed deeply, "I thought, perhaps—not that it could make any difference—she gave her love to him; it could never be mine. Well, I have my father still, and you, dear old fellow."

He held out his hand, smiling, and Jerry took it in his with a gentle grasp, while he turned things over in his mind. Betty must stay away a few days longer, then he laughed to himself as he thought of the joy of reconciliation, the future which was opening like a brilliant rose for Paul and himself.

But when the end came—when for the last time he entered Mary's room, which now looked out on dreary, rainsodden lawns, leafless trees and flowerless beds, his heart sank. There was no dream-like atmosphere now; the governess crocheted an antimacassar of a wonderful fine pattern, the fire burned cheerfully and life was full of practical everyday matters. Only their hearts dreamed still. The earl came in during the sitting.

"It is creditable work, Mr. Dell, for one so young; you have a future, no doubt, and will go far. I shall hope to see more of you; my sisters, too, will be pleased if, when you are at Cloudesley, you will call and see them." He shook hands with stately cordiality and departed.

The last moments were flying by, the tale was still untold. Jerry sent up a prayer from his heart, and something told him that she too was doing the same. A few minutes' silence, and it was answered. A servant at the door summoned the

governess. No sooner had the door closed than he flung down his tools and was by her.

"My lady, my lady—is it good-bye?" She looked up beseechingly, the blue eyes beneath their tears, like violets in a deep pool. "You can but kill me—" he whispered, and he caught her hands. "You can but call and have me put out, but I must tell you, and you must listen. I love you, Mary, I love you—I've loved you always—I shall love you for eternity; you are rich—and a lady—and I—" he stopped—remembering, and she, thinking he spoke of poverty, crept closer. It was enough. With a muffled shout of ecstasy he caught her to him. She gave a low, sweet laugh of utter content and nestled near his heart. Lifting her to him he bent and kissed the lovely face, dawn-like in its rosy purity.

"Not good-bye," he whispered joyfully, "only 'God be with you, my darling, till we meet again.' Mary—will you meet me? Will you wait in the garden to-night? Would you dare, beloved?" There was perfect trust in the sweet face as she raised it from his embrace.

"I would dare anything for you, Jerry," adding softly, "even my father's anger."

"Then to-night, at midnight, in the oak glade," he whispered hurriedly, for a footstep sounded outside.

"Go—go—" she pushed him from her. "Betty will help." Betty, of course. Why, the fates were working for him, and when the governess returned she heard the end of a conversation of which Mary's new maid was the subject. He left the house with wing-shod feet. Oh, but the dull November skies were blue and laughing, the red sun shone through white mists, a fire matching the fire in his heart, the leafless trees, the flowerless beds, were only waiting the call of love to leap to life and beauty.

She watched him go, then stood for a moment as one would stand if suddenly transported to a new world; wondering—almost afraid to explore. The governess put things tidy, then went, telling her pupil to follow. Mary crossed the

room as in a dream; things about her took on a fresh aspect—the aspect of things in new surroundings; it seemed they were watching—sympathising silently as friends. She passed into the great hall, mechanically making her way to the staircase. The light from a window fell on her upturned face; the chaplain, advancing towards her, stopped abruptly, and laid his hand on her shoulder. He gazed into her eyes with that piercing look which seemed to read her inmost thoughts, and consciousness returned. She blushed crimson and dropped her eyelids.

"My daughter, you are happy?" She lifted her face shyly.

"Yes, Father." Under the keen glance she grew timid.

"Such is the happiness which Mother Church gives to her children." He raised his hands and placed them on her head. "Bless you, my daughter." She bent in obeisance, then hurriedly sought her room, and sinking into a chair, let her gaze wander over the fair landscape of dreams, where already a castle was building, whose foundations had been laid one sunny morning in June. Father Francis' gaze followed the girlish figure; there was a little frown, a slightly puzzled expression on his face. As she vanished through an arched doorway he turned towards the back of the house where, among servants' quarters, looking out to stables and outhouses, my lord had his private room.

He was sitting idle, his head resting on his hand. A mass of papers and account books strewed the table, the great bureau was rolled open, and everywhere was evidence of business matters, save only in my lord's listless attitude. He raised his head as the door opened, and with a weary gesture swept some of the litter away.

"Come in, Father—sit down." He rose and drew a chair forward. The priest waved it aside, waiting silently.

"I sent for you, Father, there are matters concerning my daughter," he paused, "I should say—concerning her entry into the Church—matters—" again he paused. Father Francis waited a moment, then threw in a word.

"The time is growing short, my son."

"Yes." He was silent again, looking through the window with a far-away expression, idly twisting a paper weight. The priest watched keenly.

"As you say, the time is growing short—too short," he murmured under his breath. The listener's quick ear caught the words, an expression of alertness passed across his face.

"Too short," repeated the earl dreamily; then suddenly rousing, he turned and pushed the toy away. "Father, does our Church realise the strength of natural affections? How close the ties, which, once made, can never be broken?"

"Our Church recognises in the resignation of natural affections the purest offering of her children; self-renunciation, the brightest jewel in her crown. As you say, the natural affections are as steel links in the chain of life, only by constant self-denial, by prayer, by fasting, can they be dissolved."

The earl sat silent again; the priest's keen glance seemed to read every passing thought. Presently he spoke—hesitatingly—and only one versed in the lore of humanity could have recognised the stern, cold personality of Edward, Earl of Cloudesley.

"Father, I have known Mary for nineteen years as the daughter of the woman who wrecked my life's hopes; since she came here I have known her as my daughter—and—as such—she has crept into my heart—day by day forging fresh fetters of—yes—of love."

"You should have destroyed them—at once—" interrupted the priest sternly, "plucked them from your heart, at whatever cost."

"The flesh is weak, Father," was the humble reply. "And so subtle is temptation that the seed has grown to a tree before one realises that it was sown."

"True, my son; yet even a tree can be uprooted."

"Nay, Father, not uprooted, only cut down; the roots have pushed their way so deeply into life that they are there as long as life endures." The priest rose—his tall, forbidding

figure hovering like an ominous shadow; he lifted his hands as though to thrust something away; the earl shrank as from a blow.

"If the seed has become a tree, my son, then cut it down—tear it from your heart—uproot every shoot; think of her as saved from earthly temptation—from the world—the flesh. Think of her in that garden of happiness, as an angel, happy in her innocence, in the charge of our dear lady and the blessed saints. And—" he came a step nearer, the clear, resonant voice grew soft and dreamily tender, "in such thoughts, those roots of natural affection will grow and blossom into sweet remembrance and a love above the love of the world." There was a long, long silence. At last my lord lifted his face; the features, noble, honourable, stern, bore marks of an inward struggle.

"You are right," he said, then bowed his head again. "Forgive me, Father." The priest stretched out his hands in silent blessing. And when the earl raised himself, he was, as usual, cold, courteous, every emotion masked. He moved to his chair again, and the priest spoke.

"I will make arrangements for the ceremony; Mary can go back to the convent at once."

"No," interrupted the earl, "I have promised the Reverend Mother that she should have a year in the world; I cannot go back from my word." The priest waved his hand airily.

"That, my son, can be easily remedied. Mother Monica will understand, and be the first to acquiesce." My lord shook his head.

"No—my word is given—nothing shall alter my decision. But Mary shall go to Cloudesley, to her aunts. I will not see her till I say good-bye on Christmas Day; she goes the following morning." Father Francis inclined his head; there were limits even to his authority. "I will write to my sisters at once; she shall go within the week." The priest rose.

"My son, you have done well. Meanwhile, see the child as little as possible, keep to your own apartments."

He left the room, and the earl drew paper and ink towards him, rang for his steward, and entered on a day of business matters, burying that other beneath everyday affairs. Yet, in the quiet night watches a vision thrust itself before him, banishing sleep; a lovely vision, of home and love, and earthly ties; of fair daughters and noble sons, of loved sisters and trusted friends, and ever through the silence came the patter of tiny feet, the merry sounds of childish voices.

It was the governess who told her, and even in the anguish of listening to the sentence, Mary was grateful that it was not Father Francis. Well she knew that in her face he would read her secret—the secret which she hardly dared breathe to her own soul—not even to Betty could she speak of it, and yet Betty must be told.

Pleading a headache, a real one, she went to her room and waited till the house was sunk in silence. Then, calling Betty, she wrapped herself in a dark cloak; while doing so, she managed to tell something of the story, and the listener, with wide open eyes, filled in gaps, finally asking for names. Mary turned her blushing face away.

"You shall go first, Betty," she whispered, "and then you'll see."

The adventure was mightily to Miss Betty's taste; she donned another black cloak, and the two girls slipped noiselessly from the room, locking the door behind them. Breathlessly they crept down a back staircase into the work-room, where the marble bust seemed to follow with its eyes, wondering what its sister was doing so late. Opening the long window they stepped into the damp, dark night. Mary stopped and drew her hand from the other's warm clasp.

"Go, Betty," she whispered, "down the oak glade; tell him I'm coming."

Betty's light feet made no sound as she tripped away and was lost in the blackness. The charm of adventure was upon her, and she laughed gaily as she bumped against a low gate, and knew it for the entrance to the grove.

A rustle in the trees and a form came towards her; in the darkness she could distinguish nothing till he was upon her. His arms were round her, yet as she lifted her face, came mutual recognition, and she fell back.

"Jerry, you—you! I thought—" and then suddenly the whole truth burst upon her, and she stepped near again. "Oh, Jerry, how could you, how could you?" she cried under her breath in indignant surprise. "How dare you? You—a poor boy—and my lady—"

"I know, Betty, I know; but where is she? Couldn't she come? Oh, tell me—tell me."

"She's coming. But Jerry—how's it going to end? You can't marry a lady."

"Can't I, Betty? But I can, and I will. And I'll work for her—work—till she has everything she has given up for me. For Betty—listen—she loves me—me—loves me—just as I am—for myself. Betty, Betty—it's Heaven on earth—it's—it's—" his voice trailed away in rapture, and Betty stood transfixed. A little hand touched hers softly; she started, and Jerry turned. With a muffled cry he caught the black figure in his arms, and Betty moved away, half frightened, half elated at the new state of things.

And there, in the misty autumn wood, with spectral trees around, and the dead leaves of summer beneath their feet, safe in the shelter of his arms, she listened to his tale of love, then sobbed out her news. He heard it to the end, but long before had made up his mind; Betty had supplied the cue.

"I can't go, Jerry—oh, I can't leave you." The soft cheek, tear wet, against his own, gave him courage.

"When, beloved?" he whispered.

"This week—perhaps in three days. Directly my aunts write. Ah, Jerry, save me. I am wicked—but I can't—oh, I can't go back to the convent."

He held her close—silently; then lifted her till her head rested on his shoulder, and her ear was so near that she could catch the lowest whisper.

"Mary, are you brave? What will you dare—to escape?"

"All." The answer was clear.

"Dearest—there is a way—one way—it leads to happiness. Will you brave it?"

"With you, Jerry—yes." He was silent again; her sobs ceased, and she lay quiet, waiting for his next words.

"Mary—" the words were breathed, not spoken, "will you —oh, my darling, it's asking so much—" he faltered—the little head crept, if possible, closer.

"Jerry—I—I—love you—I can't go."

"Then—will you marry me?" She turned her white face towards him; even in the darkness he could see her eyes shining like amethysts in a setting of pearl. Her heart beat so close to his that they seemed one, and the low murmured answer rang in his ears like a silver trumpet:

"Yes, Jerry." Their lips met in silent rapture; all around the dead trees whispered their song of hope, of love awaking, of life. But a rustle in the dead undergrowth told of Betty, and Jerry roused to practical things.

"The time is short, beloved. I will get all ready to-morrow. Will you dare to meet me the following morning? Betty will help you." She shook her head.

"Not Betty, Jerry. I couldn't live with her and know she held my secret. I love her too well to let her share my father's anger. I will come alone."

His heart was too full for words; her courage, her simple faith, stirred his very soul. But he had enough worldly experience to know that others might not have equal belief in him. Suddenly he thought.

"Mary, would you mind my old nurse—Margery—she'll keep our secret, and she loves me."

"Yes, yes—" came the happy whisper; "tell her, Jerry, and bring her with you." A few more practical details, a last long embrace, a promise to meet again on the following night, and Betty was summoned from her lurking place. The two girls made their way homewards, silent, one from happiness,

the other sobered by remembrance of her own escapade, and filled with doubts.

Jerry went home on wings, snatched a few hours' rest—joy had banished sleep—and rose with the consciousness of much to do. There was Margery to tell, a licence to procure—to find a priest, a church, and above all, a golden ring with which to bind her to him for ever and ever.

Margery listened with smiling face, into which had returned all the sunny cheerfulness of old, and nodding approval, put on her bonnet to accompany him, also to purchase new finery for such a day. Reuben was left with Paul. That same evening came a letter from the north; a letter which, in its lonely yearning, sent a pang through Jerry's heart. In his great happiness, the old man who loved him so well had been for the time almost forgotten.

"In ten days, grandson, is your birthday," it ran. "I am counting the hours to seeing you, and all things are in readiness for your reception. I pray God my heart may not break with joy; but they say happiness never kills, only sorrow, and I have lived through many years of bitterness. So, grandson, start at once and come to your loving grandfather."

Jerry sat thoughtful. Till Mary was out of London he could not go; the birthday must wait, if needs be. He put it away for the present—there were other matters more urgent—one especially which was troubling him. Paul was slowly recovering; the count, hurrying home, would arrive in London that night or the following morning, and Jerry wondered how much happiness was allowable under the circumstances. His grandfather's words seemed to come as an answer—"They say happiness never kills—only sorrow." He folded the letter and went upstairs. Paul was lying quiet, and the intense sadness of his expression struck his friend anew. He turned, his face lit with a wan smile. Jerry sat down beside him.

"You're better, Paul, aren't you?"

"Yes." There was no hopefulness in the tone.

"That's good. We'll have you downstairs in no time now. Did you know that your father may be here soon, to-night, perhaps?" He nodded.

"My dear father, I'm afraid he'll feel it badly; he's no one but me. And—now—" he added softly, "I've no one but him. But for that—and one other hope—I could wish for death." Jerry laughed lightly.

"Death! Nonsense, Paul. You're weak and ill; why should you wish for death? You're young—you've money, position, everything that makes happiness. Cheer up, old fellow, you'll be well soon, and laugh at these gloomy fancies."

He shook his head sadly. "No, Jerry, happiness is not for me; you know now—I thought you knew before—while he lives there is only sorrow for me. I thought—I hoped—she loved me. That's over—a dream—but with it goes my life." Jerry sat silent, wondering how to tell him.

"Paul," he said at length, "what if you were mistaken? What if—she—loved you—still?"

He laughed bitterly. "Loved me, Jerry? No—she never gave me any encouragement—not from the first; and her letters—what few there were—were cold—distant. And that last one! Jerry, may you never know the anguish of losing all you love. No—she loved him—has married him, no doubt. My mission is to watch, some day she'll find the need of me, and come. But love—no."

"But what if he—were—dead? What if those letters were not from her—if she knew nothing of them? Suppose her own were stolen on the way."

He was frightened at the effect of his words. Every vestige of colour left Paul's face, leaving it drawn and white. He raised himself and spoke, and his words came thick and slow.

"Jerry—take care. Don't give me—hope—only to—take it away." He put him back on the pillows with hands that trembled.

"Paul, it is true; I told you a lie; believe me, it was only for your good. She is free—she loves you—has always loved you. Can you bear it?"

"Bear it! Oh, my God—my God!" The words burst out like life blood from a wounded heart. For a moment there was silence, then the colour came back into his face, and with it, a smile. "Where is she, Jerry? Let me see her, let me hear it from her own lips."

"I'll fetch her, Paul; lie down and wait patiently. She is with Lady Mary."

He lay back obediently, wondering weakly. Jerry hurried away, and calling a coach, despatched it with a messenger and a letter to Betty, then back again to wait for his friend.

Never had the hours seemed so long. Many a time did he repent of having told too soon. Paul's restlessness grew every minute; his eyes were brilliant as though with fever, a crimson spot burned on each cheek. He insisted upon sitting up, called for a mirror and groaned at his uncouth appearance, finally sending for a barber to shave him. In desperation Jerry gave way; it helped to pass the time. But when at length came the rattle of wheels on the cobbles outside, Paul turned deadly white and leaned back, though waving him away.

"I'm all right—go—send her."

"You'll be careful, Paul, won't you?" he said anxiously, intending to warn Betty. But there was no time—the quick footsteps were on the stair, along the passage. For a moment they paused, then the door opened softly. Paul sat forward, his lips trembling. It opened further, and she stood hesitating on the threshold, rosy red, with an expression of tender love new to Jerry.

"Betty!"

At the sound of his voice, weak and gentle, she started, took a step forward, glanced at Jerry, who slipped behind her, then, with a low sobbing cry, ran across the room and

fell on her knees by the chair, hiding her face in her hands. He saw him raise her with the sound arm, he heard her murmured words—"Forgive me—oh, Paul—forgive me," a quick glimpse of ruddy gold hair against a dark cheek, and he closed the door softly.

Downstairs he told his tale, warning off all intruders, and when Margery, some two hours later, went in, she returned, nodding cheerily, "He'll do now," she said.

Jerry took her back that evening—a laughing brilliant Betty; provoking, teasing, yet with a new something which made her infinitely more lovable, more winsome—even Jerry, absorbed in his own affairs, felt the attraction.

"He's coming back to Cloudesley, Jerry," she said, dimpling and flushing. "Perhaps with us, if he's well enough. You know we're going to the Dower House soon—and I don't mind one bit now." Things seemed indeed to be taking on a new lease of happiness. That evening saw every detail settled for the morrow.

He woke early, dressed himself, wearing the fob chain which Toby, with tears in his eyes, had besought him to accept for luck, and went to the meeting place, where he waited rather than at home. In the porch of the little chapel, new, crudely coloured, devoid of all romance, she met him; but she brought romance with her, and the figures in their shrines, even the dear Mother herself, smiled down, as he led her to the altar, and with only the old nurse and a sleepy pew opener for witnesses they plighted their troth before God and the holy angels for ever and ever.

He took her away, Margery returning discreetly alone; and London, dirty, foggy, sulky London, gleamed rosy through a mist of love and happiness. She told him that, on the morrow, they would go to Cloudesley, and he broke the news of his journey to the north; but of the reason, he said nothing. One day he would fetch her, with pomp and ceremony, with prancing horses and a fairy carriage.

"You'll trust me, Mary?" She clung closely.

"Yes, Jerry, for ever; but you'll be in time, won't you?" she added anxiously. "They want to send me to the convent after Christmas."

He promised to be back before that—oh, long before that. And so they parted—saying farewell in a quiet street—lingeringly—again and again—till she tore herself away.

"I must go, Jerry; Miss Gilbert thinks I am taking a morning walk with Betty, who is waiting for me not far off."

He watched her go, returning with a light heart and visions of a day when he should claim her openly as her equal. And she, going quietly to her room, fell on her knees and prayed for forgiveness for her love. Then, with a few tears, took the golden circlet from her finger, and passing a white ribbon through it, hung it round her neck that it might rest upon her heart till he should replace it.

Toby returned that afternoon, a changed Toby—happy, cheerful, busy—and the old house seemed bathed in a haze of gentle happiness. Paul came down that evening and tongues flew fast. Dinner was a feast indeed, Toby bringing all his inventive powers to bear upon it. Margery tripped backwards and forwards, from kitchen to hall—"like a young maiden," Reuben told her—calling up a flush to the withered cheek, a deeper smile to the smiling lips, and Toby's song echoed from back regions.

> Begone, Dull Care; I prithee, bego-one from me,
> Begone, Dull Care; too long hast thou tarried with me.
> My wife shall dance, and I will sing, and merrily go the da-ay,
> For I hold it one of the wisest things to dri-ive Dull Ca-are away.

Paul, from his couch, laughed. "You've got to find her yet, Toby." Toby looked sheepish.

"Perhaps. Yet—there's little Matty Golden, the blacksmith's daughter, at Channington. She lives with my mother

since—since—they thought me—dead. She—" He shook his head merrily and continued his song.

And when dinner was over, the candles snuffed, the fire made up, Reuben slipped away, returning with a bottle of choicest wine. Toasts were drunk, laughter and gay mirth joined hands and sang together—only the Jew's face wore an occasional look of thoughtfulness. It was Margery who asked the reason; he smiled at her as she sat beside him.

"My friend, it hurts me that one man should cause so moch misery—that his death should bring so moch happiness." Toby answered him.

"No, sir, it is we who do wrong who bring unhappiness; if only we are strong and true to ourselves, nothing evil can hurt us."

And Reuben beamed like a great sun at mid-day.

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE GOOSE-GIRL BORROWS A SILVER GOWN

THE count, arriving next morning, pronounced his son able to travel. Calling at Cloudesley House later, he returned with the news that Lady Mary was leaving on the morrow, and arrangements had been made for all to go together.

Reuben shook his head mournfully at the thought of the general exodus. Whether the idea came from Margery, or Toby, or from his own kind heart, or whether it was a simultaneous one arising from all three, was hard to say, but Toby was despatched that day to fetch his mother as company for Margery. Jerry and Paul laughed delightedly at the Jew's duplicity.

"Two's company, Jer—three's none," whispered Paul.

He might easily have seen her under pretext of saying good-bye to Betty, but he was afraid of showing his feelings, and Mary, he knew, could hardly fail to do the same. So—as long ago—he watched the great travelling carriage pass from behind the shelter of a tree. She leaned from a window and smiled at him; her eyes met his, holding them till a turn in the road separated them. But on the ground lay a knot of ribbon plucked from her gown, and with it a pencilled line, "Come soon, dearest; I shall count the hours."

He pressed it to his lips, then placed it carefully away, hurrying back to make his own preparations for departure on the morrow. Taking the journey by easy stages, it was late evening ere Cloudesley was reached. They were silent, each thinking their own thoughts—Mary, of the future waiting her, and the long hours before happiness would be hers

again; Betty, shame-faced, as she met her lover's eyes in the darkness, remembering the events of the past fortnight; and Paul himself, as they passed the end of the lane, calling back that wild hurried ride in the October dawn only a year or so ago, and the anguish, the pain, lived through since then. The count returned with the pleasant feelings of an older man who has been separated from loved surroundings, from his home and all the daily habits, for a long period.

The Dower House was lighted cheerfully; its doors stood wide to receive the tired travellers. In her quiet, but authoritative way my Lady Karen had ordained that Paul and his father should stay on till—she had hesitated a little, then added, "Till after Christmas." And the count, contrasting his lonely home with the other, and its society of women and young people, accepted gladly. Betty, having passed the ordeal of her aunt's scolding, her uncle's loving welcome, returned to the Dower House. "Till after Christmas," she also said, sighing—a sigh which was echoed by the farmer, not by his wife—words or actions were more in her way:

"My lord should be ashamed o' hisself," she cried angrily. "Shutting up his only daughter, an' the bonniest daughter ever man had—almost," she added, glancing at Betty, "in a convent wi' black nuns an' priests, when she should be thinkin' only o' pleasurin' and lovemakin', an' gettin' settled for life. If my ladies had their way they'd never let her go—leastways, not my Lady Kezzy. In spite o' my Lady Mima, they know that men an' women was meant for marryin' and children, same's the birds an' the flowers, an' everything else the good God made."

Ah, yes—my ladies knew it. They had wondered greatly at Mary's visit to themselves, Lady Kezzy with gratitude, Lady Karen, penetrating deeper, reading to the depths of her brother's heart, guessed the reason, and hope, never extinguished, burned brightly again. Yet she also knew that vows once taken by my lord would never be cancelled. For her remained to take the initiative. But to scheme was false to

my lady's nature; for the first time perhaps in her life she stooped to consult her sister, and my Lady Kezzy, with a pink flush in her cheek—for it was a delicate subject—and a strange hesitation in her gentle voice, gave counsel.

"If—if—Mary—could love Paul, sister; if—if—they could be—married—before Christmas—why then—"

Lady Karen rose, and stooping, kissed her sister.

"Kezzy, I believe you're right; but—suppose they do not care for each other." Lady Kezzy grasped her hands eagerly.

"Oh, but they must, they must. Who could help loving Mary, sister—so winsome, so lovely; and Paul—" the flush deepened, "is he not handsome and young; her equal in birth—in position; and thrown together. Oh, sister, it must be, perhaps," her eyes were shining, "even now we shall save her." My Lady Karen sighed. More experienced, of a sterner mould than her sister, she saw the difficulties. Time was short—her brother's anger; but—Mary must be saved at any cost. She thought sometimes of consulting Mother Monica, then put the idea away, as a resource only to be used when all else failed.

So each inmate of the Dower House donned his mask, even the count. In quiet corners, by the language of glances and smiles, Paul and Betty did their love-making, not yet was the time for disclosure. The farmer, whose pride was every whit as great as my lord's, would never allow his niece to wed above her station, and Paul dreaded his father's disappointment, even though it might be accompanied by a reluctant consent. Betty, too, had her share of pride; not even to Mary did she speak of her secret; secure in Paul's love, she was content to see him in her lady's company from morning to night.

Both girls carried their secrets lightly, as happy secrets should be carried. Against Mary's was weighed her father's anger. With perfect trust in her lover she had common-sense to know that difficulties lay thick in their path—that even those overcome, the future meant poverty, obscurity,

and—though they were as naught—the thought of estrangement from her friends and banishment from her loved home made her grave and quiet.

If she had been dear as a child, now in the pride and beauty of maidenhood she was doubly so. My Lady Karen, ever stern and undemonstrative, showed her love but rarely, but my Lady Kezzy gave herself heart and soul to her niece, and Mary, responding warmly, the two, in spite of the disparity in age, became inseparable. When two are linked together by love and circumstances and constant companionship, secrets are apt to leak out. Many a time it was on Mary's tongue to speak of her new found happiness, but discretion prevailed. Not so my lady. Within a week, by sundry words, dark hints and mysterious nods, she had let out their dearest wish. Mary in childhood had heard it mentioned, and now, knowing its utter futility, showed no surprise; her aunt, interpreting the reception favourably, glowed with satisfaction.

As she lay awake that night thinking of Jerry, his last letter, enclosed in one to Betty, clasped in her hand, Mary resolved to take a step on her own responsibility. She would tell Paul. He was Jerry's friend and hers, and the secret was safe with him. Not even to him, however, did she tell of that last step taken. She waited her opportunity, but my Lady Kezzy was first. Triumphant with her venture, she plunged wildly into its sequel, and having, by a stratagem, disposed of Mary on an errand with Betty to Mrs. Chubbe, she artfully introduced the subject to Paul. Like Mary, secure in his own love, he too betrayed no surprise; looking further ahead he saw that the plan might prove useful both to ward off suspicion and also to gain time. Lady Kezzy received his non-committal answers with delight.

"They had not thought of such a thing before, sister," she said, when retailing the conversation; "now they will see each other with different eyes, and surely—surely—love will come."

Lady Karen listened gravely and shook her head with a grim smile.

"Always looking on the bright side, Kezzy. Let us hope that this time you may be right." It gave zest to the dull December days, passing so quickly. Even Mary smiled at her aunt's little manœuvres to throw them together, and on the first occasion, shyly blushing, with downcast eyes, she told Paul, bidding him keep her secret, for her own sake, for his friend's. He listened with thoughtful eyes and slightly puzzled brows.

"Have you realised what it means, Mary," he said, "the earl's anger—poverty?" She interrupted him.

"I know, Paul, I have reckoned everything. It means love and happiness and joy, or a living death between convent walls, and I have chosen."

"Then be it so," he answered; "and you have chosen well, no matter what his birth, for Jerry can afford to let that go; he is honourable, truthful, and will make a position some day. Yes, Mary, it will come all right, you'll see. And now, in return, hear my secret." Her face grew grave as she listened.

"Paul, have you thought?" she cried in dismay. "Betty, a farmer's niece, my maid; oh, Paul, I'm disappointed." He laughed at her expression.

"Mary, we've fallen from our high estate, you and I, but into a better one—the kingdom of love. Betty will be my wife, and with you and Jerry for friends, what matters the world?" She was won.

"And oh, Paul, Betty is so sweet—so loving. I'm really glad, only—" she sighed, "I wish it was over—the anger and trouble." He smiled cheerfully at her.

"It'll all come right, Mary, with Jerry and me to pull it through. You'll see. And now I've got a tale to tell you." Laughingly he told her of the conspiracy, laughing again when he heard that she, too, had been sounded.

"Suppose," he whispered teasingly, yet three parts in earnest, "suppose we let them think we are going their way. We'll tell Betty—she'll help when she knows it is for your sake chiefly." And Betty, called in consultation, agreed, promising

to aid and abet my lady's scheme to the best of her ability. And another week passed. Every post brought a letter from Jerry, each one bidding her trust.

"A few more days," he wrote, "and I start homewards; then, dearest, you shall know why I left you. Never again shall a secret come between us." A few more days. Why, when she got the letter he would be on his way; a few more days—and she would see him again. It wanted but a fortnight to Christmas, which was to be spent at the Dower House; just themselves and the earl, who was expected the evening before.

"A quiet Christmas," said my Lady Kezzy, and Mary thought to herself that it might prove more exciting than her aunt expected. A trifling incident turned her sick with apprehension. It was as though the bands were tightening round her, and for a time, sudden terror seized her, a sense of loneliness, of helpless impotency to stand before the strength and will of her father, and that other power, personated by Father Francis.

Mother Monica, in love and gratitude to the earl, had begged permission to work the robe which was to be worn by his daughter on the great day when she became the bride of the Church. No pains had been spared, and, each sister taking part in the labour of love, the beautiful robe became a work of art. Anxious that the ladies should see it, it was sent to the Dower House, to return with its wearer.

With much ceremony it was displayed by a black-robed nun, and in spite of the repugnance with which they viewed it, the mocking symbol of marriage, my ladies could but admire the patient workmanship, the delicate tracery of the pattern, and the wonderful beauty of the garment. It was of white satin, stiff, yet softly supple; the flounces, running round and round in a never ending spiral, were worked with silver fleur-de-lis, and the nun pointed out that so many were the work of Sister Catherine, Sister Agnes, Sister Ursula, and so on, giving the whole thing a personal touch. Priceless lace

draped the low cut bodice, the slender waist, while here and there a silver rose caught and held it together. In the morning light it shimmered and gleamed—a fairy dress.

The nun was authorised to ask if my ladies would prefer the veil worked or plain. There was plenty of time if they chose the former. Lady Karen gave a decisive negative.

"Tell the Reverend Mother, sister, that I wish to provide the veil. The daughters of our house have always worn the same, and though this is no worldly bridal," she sighed, "yet, as the dress is such as would have been worn, Mary must use the veil." The sister bowed her head.

"I will tell the Rev. Mother, my lady," she answered meekly.

The little event, trifling as it seemed, cast a gloom over the Dower House. It was reality throwing its shadow, and my ladies consulted together till late in the night, Lady Karen, in a common trouble, stooping to her sister's level, even condescending to ask counsel of one, who, in wisdom of the heart, was wider versed than she.

Far away, the swineherd, already a prince, had taken his rightful place; the birthday had become a thing of the past. Each day saw a change in him, as the sense of his dignity and position grew. The laird's love and pride knew no bounds, a wish was hardly conceived when it was granted, and the days flew by in delightful succession. But Mary, through all, shone like a radiant star, always present, always longed for. Jerry, still somewhat shy of his grandfather, let the time pass, meaning each day to tell his secret, yet each night finding it untold.

But at the end of a fortnight he made up his mind, and that same evening, as they sat over their wine, he spoke of his love. The laird listened gravely, his face hidden by his hands, but said nothing till the tale was ended. For some minutes he sat wrapped in thought—at last he roused.

"I was back in the past, grandson—the past," he sighed, then, lifting his head, sat back in the tall oak chair. "Ger-

vaise, the hand of fate plays with events as men play with the figures of a game—moving them to a certain end—an end of sorrow or happiness. In yours, a marvellous game—a marvellous end. Listen, grandson. Edward Cloudesley's father and mine were brothers—mine being the younger. My cousin has no son, and Cloudesley, should I outlive him, comes to me. After my death," he gave a quick glance at the younger man's face, but it betrayed only vivid interest, "until lately, it passes to—to—" again he looked, then altered his expression. "You've heard, no doubt, that my cousin's wife left him?" Jerry nodded. "Of the right or wrong, I can say nothing; Edward is stern and cold, yet—" again he changed his form of words. "She was accompanied by a distant relative—the man who, failing a son of Cloudesley or Ardelimar, succeeds."

Dimly conscious of something underlying his grandfather's words, Jerry listened with eager interest. The old man went on.

"Long, long ago I loved my cousin Keziah; she was younger than I by many years, and a sweeter, bonnier maiden never lived—ah, well—" the long drawn sigh told a tale of past sadness. "She did not love me, her love was given elsewhere—at least I thought so at the time—to a younger man; but I may have been mistaken, for she has never married. Edward urged it, did all he could to prevail upon her to marry me, but Kezzy stood firm. He married himself, with what result you know. I too, married, a good woman—but not my first love—and your father, Gervaise, became heir to both properties, for Ardelimar came through my wife and descends to her son. At your father's death—" he pushed back his chair, and Jerry, slowly realising, rose quickly, his face white, his breath coming and going quickly. "At his death," continued the thin old voice—then stopped. The laird rose and leaned forward, one hand resting on the table, "Grandson, do you understand?"

"I—I—don't—quite—know." His voice was shrill and high —unfamiliar.

"My boy—my boy—" he stepped to him, laid his hands on his arm and looked up into the youthful face above him with a little laugh, half tearful, half joyous. "Gervaise, there is but one wife for you in the wide world, one only, who shall unite the lands and wealth of Cloudesley and Ardelimar; one only—and that is—" Jerry started to his feet with sudden understanding.

"That is—Mary Cloudesley!" he almost shouted. "Grandfather, grandfather." He had fallen forward on the table, his head on his arms, a storm of emotion fighting for outlet. The laird put his hand on the heaving shoulders waiting for the flood to pass.

"Yes, Gervaise, it's true; only—grandson, lift your head—for you've made one mistake." Jerry obeyed in wonderment; the laird was smiling. "Not Mary Cloudesley, if what you tell me is right, but—Mary Ross."

"Yes—" he sprang to his feet—"yes, it's true. Oh, grandfather, grandfather, the fates have indeed brought us to a happy ending." Instinctively, as men do in times of tension, they grasped hands, letting the tide of emotion surge and flow and ebb before they spoke.

"Grandfather," youth recovers itself before age, "I suppose —now—there will be no difficulty with—" he broke off, flushing at the familiarity of the new title, then compromising "the earl, I mean—about—the convent." The laird was grave.

"I think—I hope not. Edward is stern—relentless; yet, surely, in this case—" he stopped, then continued more cheerfully, "but we'll go together, grandson; he will perhaps listen to me—for I too have known trouble," he added softly, "from my own pride, and have repented, as—perhaps—he may."

"Then we'll go at once—to-morrow," cried Jerry joyfully. The laird shook his head and smiled.

"There must be some preparations, Gervaise; when Ross

of Ardelimar brings home his bride, it must be in state. We will start in two days, arriving at Cloudesley by the twentieth, which will give us time for explanations and a joyous Christmas."

Jerry saw no objection; the delight of fetching his princess with the pomp and grandeur of a prince, almost compensated for the delay. And then fate, hitherto so kind, in its usual tricksy freakish fashion, ordained differently. He woke next morning to a white land. The snow, falling noiselessly, lay deep on mountain sides, deeper still in the valleys. The laird looked anxiously out and gave orders to hasten the preparations. But state liveries, laid by for many long years, are not quickly restored, and the repairing of a travelling carriage takes time.

The laird fretted and fumed, gave orders, cancelled them, issued new ones, in short, would have retarded instead of hastening matters, but for the sublime indifference of the servants who, knowing their master, worked stolidly on. And the snow fell—fell—softly—softly. At last all was finished, and on the morning of the sixteenth of December they started, the laird in a state of ferment almost surpassing his grandson's. The white flakes, like a fine veil, seemed to mock them as they drove through the archway.

They had been two days on their journey when Mary received the letter telling her the date of arrival. She shed a few tears as she read it, for the past weeks had been strenuous. With perfect trust in him she could hardly help wondering what business had kept him so long away, nor imagining how, in the case of delay, she should bear her father's wrath unaided. Now, the weight was lifted—another three days and he would come; she would not be alone.

The gentle voice had a new note of happiness; the lovely face was lit with something more than mere surface beauty, and my ladies rejoiced; things were going well. In a day or two they would take the final step, and, if possible—Lady Kezzy shrank from the thought, yet bravely determined to

face her brother's anger—if possible, the wedding should be on the twenty-third.

To Paul came the first intimation of the plot deepening. Summoned by my ladies one morning he found them in a state of fluttered agitation. The conversation, hovering round trivial subjects, gradually worked towards the desired end. Lady Karen helped her sister's faltering words with a few blunt sentences.

"The fact is this, Paul," she said, "Mary must be saved—at any cost; I repeat, at any cost. You are equals in birth, in position—you love each other. Ah, Paul—" she rose, and standing behind him as he sat at the table, laid her hand softly on his shoulder, "my dear boy, will you help us—and her?" He looked up into the stern, dark face, soft now—

"Of course I will, Lady Karen. I love Mary, and if it is in my power to save her, God knows I will do it, cost what it may." Lady Kezzy jumped up, and running round the table caught his hand.

"I knew you would; oh, Paul—you've saved her. If only you'll—" she broke off, glancing at her sister, "tell him, Karen." My lady obeyed, her stern voice faltering a little.

"We thought, Paul—if you love each other—that, once married—Mary could refuse to obey her father, and—" He stopped her.

"Do you mean—that—that—we should—"

"Yes," she finished the sentence in her usual way, "I do. I mean that, before Christmas, you should marry Mary—here—secretly." He shook his head.

"It could not be, Lady Karen; Mary would never consent."

"Will you ask her?" she replied eagerly. He was silent; time was everything, and there was the keeping of their secrets.

"I will ask her, certainly, as you wish it, but—" again he shook his head; Lady Kezzy broke in:

"But you'll urge it, dear boy; oh, Paul—save her. Go now—at once—and let us have her answer." He thought

things over as he left them. It was the eighteenth, any moment Jerry might come—only let matters lie quiet till then. He found Betty and told her. She, too, shook her head, but advised tactful delay.

"Suppose he doesn't come, Paul, till—till—"

"Ah, then—then—we must find some other plan; but he'll come, Betty, trust Jerry."

And still the snow fell—day after day. Far away in the north a great travelling carriage struggled on through the soft white carpet, growing deeper every hour. Darkness fell, and the tired horses, plunging wildly, sank to their knees; the carriage gave a lunge forward, then to the side, finally settling down and down till it came to a standstill. The laird pushed open a window and looked out. The flare of lanterns fell on the white expanse, on the faces of men loosening the frightened horses with shouts and encouraging words. For a moment he watched, then called "Andrew!"

"Aye, laird." The old servant came to the carriage door.

"You must take lanterns and two of the boys, and go seek help; shovels and ropes, and men, if possible. We must get out at any cost. Go—at once."

"Ay, laird."

In five minutes the men had dispersed, Andrew and two of the postillions going east, the coachman and the others turning to the west, leaving the remainder of the party to wait with what patience they could. In an hour—it seemed like months—they returned, bringing two shepherds with the necessary tools, and the news that they were a mile off the main road and ten from a village. The laird groaned again.

"Get us out, lads," he cried, "to the high road; we cannot wait." But it was not till midnight that the main thoroughfare was regained; step by step, a man at each leader's head, the tired horses accomplished the ten miles, and morning light saw outlines of cottages, marking a halt. Here a short rest was imperative and farm horses found to take them to the next posting town.

So, almost inch by inch, they fought their way, meeting no vehicle, except once the mail coach, like their own delayed by a detour and a drift, like them already a day late and likely to be more. It was the night of the twentieth when they arrived in Edinburgh, only to hear fearful tales of mountain passes lost in the snow, of highwaymen, of coaches held up, even of the rifling of her Majesty's mail bags. In no wise daunted they pressed on, taking little rest, and found that money can do most things. York was reached and from there the roads were comparatively clear. The laird breathed.

"We shall do it, grandson—if all goes well."

Jerry had few words; he thought of his love waiting, counting the hours; of her anguish as the days passed. Did she still trust him? And his heart said "Yes—yes." Time—time—was all he wanted, and he urged the laird to still greater efforts.

But of the real anguish he could hardly guess. As the long expected day passed, her heart sank low and lower. She strove to maintain her usual demeanour, but when the following morning broke, and the hours went by, bringing no sign, no message, she fled to Paul, sobbing out her grief, while he listened with troubled face.

"Paul, Paul, save me—oh, save me! What if he does not come in time? Once back in the convent I am lost. Oh, help me—help me! If you only knew—all." He turned from his musing.

"What more is there, Mary? Tell me, dear—everything." And in her despair, with frightened glances round, she clung to him, whispering her secret in his ear in tones so low he had to bend to hear.

"Mary—" he caught her hand, "brave girl—a marriage with me—would be—a mock one; and time—time—yes."

He talked, persuaded, finally leaving her comforted, and with a promise that if to-morrow passed without Jerry, she would go through the form of marriage, and taking Betty, they three would journey to London, seek out Reuben, and lie

hid there till Jerry should return. A wild scheme, worthy of youth and romance.

Paul went to my ladies' sitting-room to give his final answer. He found Mrs. Chubbe with them, and the beautiful dress with its attendant fineries spread on a couch, having been displayed to the old servant. She took her leave as he entered, curtseying deeply as she went. Lady Karen looked up expectantly. "Is it 'yes,' Paul?" she asked, and with a little laugh he inclined his head. Lady Kezzy sprang towards him, half sobbing.

"Paul, Paul, she's saved—our dear one." For a moment my Lady Karen turned—not even at that moment would she betray emotion—then swept towards them, stately, majestic, and holding him, looked straight into his eyes.

"Dear boy, you'll make her happy, won't you? Remember, she has been gently brought up." He took her hand.

"She shall be happy, Lady Karen. She shall have love, devotion, such as few women have." She was silent, then lightly turned the subject.

"Come and see the sisters' beautiful work, Paul," and the next half hour was spent in displaying the dainty fineries and making arrangements for the ceremony. Paul admired, even handled the glittering dress, the priceless lace of the veil. As he did so, a sudden thought leaped to his brain—a wonderful, daring thought—no—an inspiration. He heard their voices as from a distance; his brain was awhirl. He could think of nothing but the wild suggestion, which grew clearer every moment. At the first opportunity he took his departure, and going straight to Betty, told of the glorious new born thought.

So again the long day passed; night came, and the morning of the twenty-third dawned. Mary's white face was accounted for by the coming excitement, but Betty's usually pale cheeks were flushed, her sparkling eyes gentle and sweet, and the saucy head drooped shyly as she met his longing gaze.

That day came a gleam of hope; tales reached them of the heavy snowstorms in the north, of coaches delayed, and

Mary's heart leaped for joy. Time—time—was all that was needed, and she breathed relief as she thought of Paul's wonderful plan.

And all that day the carriage, with its fast horses urged on by excited post boys, fled over the now cleared roads, passing every vehicle, even the mail coach, and, only pausing to change horses, arrived in London at ten o'clock. Cramped and stiff with long sitting, the laird went to his room for a short rest and to prepare for the last part of the journey. A messenger was despatched to Highgate, where Mr. Gardiner had his private house, to drag him, if necessary, from his bed, and then Jerry broached his request, knowing it to be already granted.

"Grandfather, I want Margery with us, and Reuben—and Toby; do you mind?" The laird turned, half smiling, half sadly.

"Gervaise, understand your will is law; there is no need to ask. Command. Give your orders as my grandson." So away to the house in the square; with galloping horses and a coach only inferior to the one which was to take them to Cloudesley.

He found them seated round the fire, a cheerful, happy party, and as they greeted each other with handshakes and loving words, he told his tale, only to find it already known. A glance at Margery's face betrayed the culprit, but she braved it out.

"It had to be known, Master Jerry—sir, I mean—and I knew there'd be little or no time, and—" she excused herself, "'twas but to-day I told them."

"And now," cried Jerry, "put on your bonnet, Margery, the best one, and hurry, for I'm going to fetch her; and you, my dear, dear friends, must come too—all, Toby, Mrs. Plumtre." Laughing, hurrying, Mrs. Plumtre in everyone's way, they departed; but Toby lingered to whisper in Jerry's ear with a chuckle:

"They've done it, Jerry—while you were away." And then,

in answer to the surprised look, "they—Reuben—Margery." And Jerry, understanding, joined in the chuckle. There was time to spare when they returned, warmly clad for the long journey; and sitting over the fire Reuben told his news. Margery would fain have slipped away, but he held her close.

"And so, mein yongling, I am no more lonely. When I thought of the house without you and Toby—without her—I thought I would go mad; for how should she—so good—so sweet—how should she want an old fellow—a Jew—not even an Englishman; and yet—so strange is woman—she said yes—and so—" this very shamefacedly, "and so, since you, mein yongling, haf shown the way—we went, one morning—and—and—" he shook his head and gazed fondly at the little bent form by his side, the little worn, hard-working hand held in his great one. There was a few minutes' silence, then he spoke again.

"Mein yongling, you are now a great gentleman; yet still so dear to me you are, I must call you by that name. We—my wife," this very proudly, "and I—haf a favour to ask. Will you let us haf the cottage? I will give good price; we cannot always live here, and I want no more to play the pedlar."

And then Jerry got some of his own back.

"Do you want to insult me, Reuben? The cottage is Margery's—when it is mine to give. At present, you—or I—must ask my lord." The Jew nodded.

"I will pay him well; for, listen, mein yongling—my wife—and all, I am a rich man; I can do what I please, and now—" his voice rose with vehement emphasis; jumping up he stepped on the stool, and from the high shelf fetched down the "jar of good deeds." "Now, with her, my mädchen," he lifted her hand and kissed the fingers lightly, while Jerry could scarcely refrain from a laugh at the appellation, "I want no more such things. I will put them away; the bottles will do for lotions and pheeziques; the beads we will keep for seven years and then turn them over for luck; they will

kom handy some time." Then, suddenly catching an amused glance on Jerry's face, and a certain comical look on Toby's, he started forward, bottle in hand.

"Nein, nein," he shouted, "I will not—I will no longer be mizaire. They shall go—this minute—to the fire."

Suiting the action to the words he would have thrown them in but for Jerry and Toby, who, bubbling over with laughter, held his arms.

"No, no," they cried, "keep them—give them to Margery—anything—but not that." With a sudden inspiration Reuben turned gleefully.

"I haf it—I haf it. We will give them to Margery for 'keeps,' as the children say; and one day—" here came a wonderful winking, "one day, they shall make a necklace for some child—I will not say whose—but—" the winking was so profuse that Jerry and Toby held each other, swaying weakly with laughter. Even Margery, though not completely understanding, smiled and nodded admiringly at the stout, big-featured man, seeing beauties wholly imperceptible to the ordinary eye.

But time was up. Outside the fresh horses pawed impatiently; Mrs. Plumtre and Margery, after agitated curtseyings and polite, "After you, m'am's," took their seats; Jerry and Toby followed; Reuben, locking up, and taking a final glance at the dark, three-sided old house, joined them, and the cobble stones of the square echoed with the sound of wheels and fast trotting horses.

They picked up the laird's carriage at the Bull and Crown, also Mr. Gardiner, long whiskered, apathetic as usual, and feebly murmuring, "Romance—romance—this great city of London is full of it."

And then away—away—from dingy streets, into the snow-clad country.

CHAPTER XII

AND THE SWINEHERD COMES TO HIS OWN

CHRISTMAS EVE broke on a glittering world; sunshine gleamed on never ending whiteness. My ladies smiled and nodded, encouraging each other, putting aside the future in the joy of the present. Secrecy must be observed, and Betty was given a long day's holiday to spend with her aunt. Dressed in her best she departed openly, but within ten minutes was back in Mary's room, laughing gleefully. Opening a cupboard, she stepped in, Mary locking the door upon her, and sat demurely down till further notice.

My ladies dusted the chapel themselves. Father Andrew was admitted by the garden door, and the chapel was closed and barred while my ladies made themselves ready for the ceremony. Lady Kezzy would fain have helped her niece, but Mary threw her arms round her and begged to be alone till everything was ready; reluctantly her aunt gave way.

Church Clock struck ten. Mary, having seen the last preparations completed, went to her room, carefully barred the door, and stepped lightly to the cupboard.

"It's I, Betty—Mary." The door opened cautiously, and from the folds of a lavender silk gown, peeped Betty's laughing face. She drew her out, smiling gravely.

"It's time, Betty. We must dress." But Betty, wrapped in blissful contemplation of the glories spread out on couches and chairs, heard nothing. The silver gown, worked by the nuns' patient fingers, lay on a table, the glittering fabric catching on one side every gleam of the wintry sunshine, on the other, deepening to flaring rose-colour in the glow of a great wood fire. Even Betty sobered as she thought of its

original purpose; her Catholic upbringing gave her conscience a sudden qualm. Crossing herself, she turned and slowly began to take off the homely garments, Mary helping with trembling hands. But it was not until she lifted the shining silver robe that the full enormity of the deed burst upon her. Throwing it aside she flung her arms round the other with a stifled sob.

"Oh, my lady—my lady. I'm frightened—the future. Will Paul love me always? Will he be ashamed of me? Will he be cold and look down on me? Oh, help me—help me—I'm afraid." The warm embrace tightened; Mary's voice was tender and low.

"Hush, hush, Betty," she whispered. "Paul loves you too dearly; hasn't he shown it all these years? And other people, with me for your friend," there was just a touch of worldly pride, strange in one, who, within a week, would renounce such things for ever, "would not dare to slight you." Betty lifted her head, and looked with surprise into the sweet, fair face.

"But—but—you won't be here—you'll—" Something in the blue eyes arrested her—"What—what—?"

Lady Mary drew her near—their heads lay close together—gold of the cornfield, gold of the copper beech, met and mingled beneath the pale sun's beams, and in the silence her whisper fell on Betty's ears like the triumphant voice of an angel. She fell back, threw up her arms with a cry, stifled in time, then with a rapturous embrace, caught the other to her.

"Oh, my brave darling—my beautiful lady—my—my—" They clung to each other, crying, laughing under their breath.

At last Mary roused herself to a sense of time; Church Clock in the distance struck the half hour.

"Betty, we must be quick." Betty disengaged herself, pirouetted round the room, then once more lifted the beautiful dress.

"I'll be brave, too," she said, "and Paul will help me. We

together will face my lord and my ladies. For I love him—oh, so dearly; but you—" she caught the hands busily arranging the glittering folds. "Oh, poor Mary—poor, poor girl." Mary raised her sweet face, and it glowed with a love equal to the sparkling light on Betty's.

"No, not poor; happy, so happy—for he will come—I know."

"I was thinking of my lord," said Betty simply, and a shade passed over the beautiful face.

A soft knock on the door, and Lady Kezzy's voice startled them into action. Mary lifted her finger in a warning gesture as she answered; the light footsteps passed on, and there was silence as Betty fastened the dress and clasped a necklace of pearls round her white neck. Mary lifted the thick veil, having previously thrown a light net over Betty's head, making recognition still more difficult.

"If only your hair and eyes were lighter," she murmured. "You must keep in the shadow and not lift them; but, on the whole," she stepped back, looking her up and down critically, "I think you'll pass; the chapel is very dim, and the candles throw uncertain lights. Now kiss me, dear, and lock me up."

They embraced tenderly, and on each flushed cheek was something warm and wet. Then Mary stepped into the cupboard, and Betty, turning the lock upon her, prepared to face the ordeal.

Servants had been kept at a distance by my ladies, but for further precaution she wore a hooded mantle, gathering the dress under it. With a stealthy glance round the great landing she stole out, her heart beating wildly, and in a curious tumult of laughter and tears; fear to Betty was unknown when accompanied by excitement.

She made her way through the arched stone passage, but at the door of the chapel paused to recover breath and to summon her courage. After all, what was there to fear? Two elderly ladies, whose sight was not what it had been, and a

priest, none too brave when it came to encountering my lord's anger, and doubtless only anxious to get it over and go. She drew up her head, turned the heavy handle, and dropping her eyes demurely, entered, throwing off her cloak as she went.

The radiant vision seemed to light the dark place like the gleam of fairies' wings. My Lady Karen came forward, and taking her hand, led her to the altar. Someone moved towards her; with a shy upward glance she saw it was Paul, and any trace of fear there might have been, passed utterly. Father Andrew, gorgeous in robes stiff with embroidery and gold, advanced, and at a sign from my lady, the service began. She lifted her eyes fearlessly to her lover, and even giddy Betty realised the solemnity of what was happening.

"Who giveth this woman to this man?" asked the priest, and my Lady Karen stepped forward, placing her hand in his. A few minutes more and it was over.

"Mine, dearest, mine—" he whispered, as he bent over her, "never to part again."

They turned to go; my ladies rose from their place, but a sudden sound arrested them; a sound of voices outside the door which led to the Hall. It was flung open, and my lord, with Father Francis behind, strode into the chapel.

For a moment he stood haughtily regarding the group. Betty shrank nearer Paul, and my Lady Kezzy, gasping, clutched the oaken post of the pew entrance; only my Lady Karen, stepping into the aisle, and Paul at the top of the altar steps, gazed unflinchingly at the tall figure, the proud disdainful face. He strode nearer.

"So, sister, it was war declared, and you have—"

"Won, Edward," was the calm reply.

"Not so," my lord's lips curled; "Mary is under age, the marriage without my consent is not binding. Father Andrew," he turned to the priest, who, shivering with fright, cowered behind Paul, "you can go. This direct opposition to my wishes will not pass unnoticed."

"There is no blame attached to him, Edward," said Lady

Karen. "Whatever happens I take upon myself." Again the earl smiled cynically.

"Nothing will happen, my sister; Mary will return to the Convent of St. Monica at once, and things will be as before."

"Oh, brother!" Lady Kezzy woke from her reverie, and pushing past her sister, caught his hand. "Edward—brother—oh, take back your word—let—" He put her calmly aside and stepped past; then stopped, as a sudden sound caught his ear. He turned towards the great entrance.

"What is this?" he cried angrily. "Could you not even do it without publicity? Carriages—friends." He strode to the door; my ladies gazed fearfully at each other, and Betty gave a low, low laugh of purest ecstasy.

"Paul," she whispered, clutching his arm, "he's come—Jerry's come—oh—" The earl, fumbling at the door, pulled it open angrily—then fell back, a blank expression on his face.

Outside stood two carriages; from the first, a great state carriage drawn by four white horses, whose postillions wore wedding favours of the Ardelimar colours, with footmen in the same liveries, with shield and crest of Ardelimar emblazoned on its panels, stepped a little old gentleman, clad in festive garb of black satin, with diamond shoe-buckles and diamond studs. Behind him a younger man, dressed in finest blue cloth, with white waistcoat and gilt buttons, and wearing a fob chain of softest worked gold. They advanced to the chapel door. The earl stepped forward to greet them, still with astonishment written upon his face.

"Cousin, you are welcome," he said; "but—" he hesitated courteously.

"What brings us here, you would ask, Edward." The little old gentleman smiled and turned. "I come, my cousin, to introduce my grandson—my dear son's son—to his relations, his home—his bride."

The earl fell back. "Your grandson, Ross? Why—why—"

"It's a long tale, cousin. Let it pass for the present."

They had entered the chapel. My ladies, with surprise equal to my lord's written upon their faces, advanced to meet them. The laird greeted them, but my Lady Kezzy, forgetting reverence, her brother, everything, flew.

"It's Jerry—Jerry Dell. Cousin—what madness. What—"

"No, Keziah," he laughed at her face of dismay, "not Jerry Dell—but Gervaise Ross of Ardelimar—my grandson—my heir. The heir of Cloudesley. But," he suddenly caught sight of the gleaming figure at the dim altar, "what have you here? A wedding. Who—Gervaise—" he caught the other's arm, "this—" He had no time to finish, for Jerry was across the chapel and on the altar steps.

"Who is it?" he cried hoarsely. "Not—not—"

"No, no, Jerry," Paul answered quickly. "Do not mistrust her."

He lifted the veil slowly from the gleaming figure by his side—slowly—and a beam of sunlight fell straight on the sparkling flushed face, lifted proudly to the dark one above her.

"Betty!" cried Jerry, falling back.

"Betty!" echoed my Lady Karen, and "Oh, Betty—how could you—how could you!" from my Lady Kezzy.

The earl strode forward. "Chubbe's niece—" he laughed. "So, sister—in spite of all your little plot—" but again an interruption stopped him. Hot, breathless, hustling each other in their haste, pushing aside footmen at the door, panting, almost exhausted, came Mrs. Chubbe, her husband behind her.

"Oh, my ladies—my ladies—am I in time? They're not gone—oh, say they're not gone."

"Martha—" Lady Karen's tone was stern and angry, "did you know of this—this—base—wicked—deceit?"

"Yes, my lady—that is—no, I mean—no, and yes. Oh, my ladies," she stopped to get breath, "give me time—I can explain all—everything." Lady Karen turned from her contemptuously. The farmer stood sheepishly by, saying noth-

ing, while his wife fanned herself with a small parcel she carried and collected her wits.

"My ladies," she burst out at length, "my lord—there's a-something I must tell; it's been waitin' to be told for nigh upon twenty years, an' now the time's come. Our Betty—" She paused, half triumphant at the effect of a certain tone in the words. Lady Karen had half turned again; her sister crept nearer. Paul and Betty, clasping each other's hands, listened eagerly; even my lord and the black figure behind him were seemingly interested.

"My ladies, long ago, one snowy night, just such a one as this might be, a little child was left upon our doorstep, a little, crying thing, wantin' sadly a mother's love an' care. We took it, me an' Matthew, an' Matthew, he said, keep it, Martha—leastways, if he didn't exactly say it, he meant it—an' we've kept her, my ladies—an' brought her up—not as our own—but—as—a—lady 's far's we could, in our humble way." Lady Karen spoke scornfully.

"It is no matter, Martha, how you brought her up. She may be the daughter of low parents, or—more likely—without parents at all."

"Or maybe, my lady, her mother may have been a lady—maybe, a lady who left her home—an'—an'—her family—an' —all her riches and grandeur—for—" her voice dropped low —there was a silence—"for—love." My lady stepped forward, laying her hand on the other's arm.

"What do you mean, Martha? Speak out. Oh—my God." Mrs. Chubbe wrung her hands.

"Oh, my lady," she cried, with a half sob, "don't you understand? See—" She slipped the paper from the parcel, and a long soft sash fell in rich folds. Lady Karen gasped; her sister sprang forward and clutched at the silken fringe.

"Sister—sister—it's hers—Mima's—don't you remember? We both had them; though I was older than she, and wondered if I ought to wear it. Oh, Karen—Martha—" She

was sobbing quietly, hugging the ribbon, kissing it, and her tears falling stained the fresh colours.

"Martha, is this true? Where did you get it?" asked Lady Karen.

"My lady, it was with her, an' a letter," the words were mingled with sobs. "When my dear lady married—I helped her. I—oh, my ladies, forgive me for sayin' it—but when—she was in poverty—an' too proud—to ask for help—from her—own—she came to—me; an' when her husband—poor gentleman—died—I helped her again; an' when she—" The sobs came thick and fast—there was not a dry eye in the little chapel; even the earl had turned away. "When she—knew—she was dyin', she sent to me. 'Martha,' she says, 'if it's a girl—oh, take her—don't let her be spared the joy an' sorrow o' life—let her taste it as I have done; it is right.' An' my ladies, when—I heard that little whinin' cry at my door—I knew—she—had—left her child—an'—gone her way—to die alone."

There was a silence, only broken by low sobbing. The farmer's wife was the first to recover.

"When she got bigger, I was minded to tell you, my lady, an'—then we heard—" she paused, glancing at the earl, "that—that—my Lady Mary—was to go to a convent—" the voice grew stronger, "that she was to take all her youth, an' her pretty ways, an' her bonnie face, to where they would fade, unloved. An'—an'—so—my lord," she curtseyed, "an' my ladies—I took it upon myself to keep her; an' when I saw the young count so fond o' her, I knew 'twould all come right—an' so—I waited. This mornin' Betty sent me a letter to say she was marryin' him at half-past eleven, but 'twas earlier, my ladies—an' so I'm late."

She stopped and wiped her hot, tearful face; Lady Karen stepped to her.

"Martha—you've done right; you were always wise, my dear, trusty friend—how can we thank you for doing our

duty? Ah, me, our little Mima." But Lady Kezzy, smiling through her tears, stepped to the altar, and drawing Betty down, kissed her fondly, then led her to her sister.

"*You* know, sister, I always said Betty and Jerry were the nicest children I knew." And in spite of all, a little laugh ran round, clearing the atmosphere.

Lady Karen gathered the dazed girl to her; even Mary, dear as she was, was not quite the same as the child of the loved young sister driven from home so long ago. And my lord, too, condescended to step forward; his face was softer, the grim lines relaxed as he took Betty from his sister, and stooping, kissed her gently, while he extended his hand to the innkeeper's wife.

"And you too, Chubbe, have known nothing all these years; your wife has kept the secret well." The farmer scratched his head.

"Well, my lord, to tell the truth—I've—so to speak—known it—that is, I—"

"You've known it, master," interrupted his wife; "why, I never told."

"Nay, missus—but there's more ways of knowing a thing than words." And Mrs. Chubbe gazed admiringly at her husband, ejaculating her favourite, "Dck—dck—to think on it." But now, as the tension slackened, Jerry found words.

"Grandfather—where is she—Mary?" The earl moved forward, frowning.

"You are bold, young man—even if this tale is true." His cousin answered.

"It is true, Edward. Not only this—but—we have come to fetch your daughter. The fact is, she is my grandson's wife."

"His wife!" the words burst from him, falling like a thunderbolt on the rest of the party.

"His wife!" repeated my lord in a dazed voice. But Betty sprang forward.

"Oh, let me fetch her. I know where she is."

The silence was a tacit consent. Up the stairs she sped, nearly knocking over the count, who, hearing that great things were afoot, was on his way to the chapel, over the great square landings, into the room, and opening the cupboard door, dragged Mary out.

"Oh, come—come quickly," she cried, laughing hysterically; "such wonderful things have happened; Jerry's downstairs—and a gentleman, who says he's his grandson—and it's all right—and—take off your horrid dress." Her quick fingers were already at work on her own. "Off with it, Mary. Yes, I can call you Mary now, for you're my own—own cousin, and—" She slipped out of the glittering robe, and picking it up threw it over Mary's head. "I'll be your maid, darling, for the last time."

She pushed her into a chair, and hurriedly began to brush and do up the golden hair, Mary putting dazed questions, listening to the chattering voice, pouring out the tale as only Betty's voice could do.

"There—now you're finished—oh, the lovely, lovely dress; it's like a fairy tale—the goose-girl borrows the princess' silver robe. And now, lend me one of yours—the best."

Hastily ransacking the big oak wardrobe, she drew out a gleaming satin robe, decked herself in it, then, throwing the veil over Mary's head, she opened the door, and the two girls sped along, hand in hand. Servants, mysteriously acquainted with the news, had gathered to see them pass, curtseying low; footmen flung open doors as, with a sudden thought, Betty turned into the garden, and taking the path to the chapel, drew up at the main entrance.

The state carriages stood there—the second one by this time had discharged its occupants—and as the two girls appeared at the entrance, by some strange instinct, the earl detached himself from a little crowd, and taking his daughter from Betty, drew her into his arms, kissing her fondly.

"Never to part again, Mary, my dear daughter, till I give you to another." Then, drawing her arm through his, he led

her up the aisle, dazed and bewildered, to the altar steps.

With a choking cry she ran forward, slipped, and was caught up in a pair of strong arms.

"Beloved—beloved—I've come to you—you are mine—mine—for ever and ever."

And then, by some common impulse, the little crowd gathered round them. Father Andrew, captured and brought back, stood before them, and for the second time that morning said the beautiful words of the wedding service.

Again it was over. As they turned to leave the altar a sea of faces greeted them. How the news had spread only those who spread it could tell, but all Cloudesley had somehow got there, and not only got there, but had donned its best bib and tucker; and when they left the church and stepped into the gorgeous carriage which was to take them to the Hall, they were met with a roar of cheering, such handgrips that shamed even Jerry's, and the crowd which escorted them was Cloudesley itself.

And so, with pomp and ceremony, with pride and rejoicing, he brought his princess home—home to his heritage, his arms and his heart.

That afternoon another state procession wended its way from the Hall, and perhaps the crowd which followed it was even greater than the first, for the innkeeper was known for miles around, and his niece, for her own sake as well as his, was loved by all. But the real feast was on Christmas Day, when every villager would dine at the Hall.

Love making is contagious. That evening, my Lady Kezzy, sitting alone, was joined by the count. He came towards her as though for a purpose.

"Kezzy," he whispered, "long ago, I thought you loved your cousin—Edward told me. You gave me no encouragement—and I, thinking it hopeless, turned from my home and married another. Afterwards I wondered; to-day, I asked your cousin—and he told me—to come to you. For

Kezzy, we are no longer young; my son is gone from me, and I am lonely. Is it too late for forgiveness? Will you come to me—even now?"

And my Lady Kezzy, for one brief second lifted her eyes, then, casting them modestly down, whispered her answer.

The Yule log burned low; the guests, hastily summoned, had dispersed. My Lady Karen and her brother sat together in the small oak chamber, leaving the great wide drawing-room to the lovers. Lady Kezzy and the count, together at last, were silent in their happiness. No brilliant future lay before them; only the gentle merging of two lives into one, only peaceful happiness in the years still left.

But for those young lives, emerging from clouds and darkness, the broad highway, sunflecked, flower-strewn, unrolled itself before them, stretching on and on to the eternal blue.

Jerry rose, and opening the wide door, stepped on to the terrace, and wrapping Mary in a shawl, drew her with him. Down the wide marble steps, across the glittering, frost-speared lawns, past the chapel, and out through the massive gates to the little sleeping village. Fair shone the Christmas moon, glimmered the snow on low thatches; frost sparkled merrily on hedges, on darkly gleaming windows, and even under Mary's light footsteps the ground crackled and laughed.

They turned through a little gate into a deeper silence, by by-paths, till they reached the corner beneath Church Clock, and drawing her close, he gazed down at the widow's grave.

"Ah, Jerry," she whispered, "if we had but known—all those years, so near—and yet so far apart." He looked into her deep eyes, his square brown face filled with the light of a great love.

"It was better, dear love; else how should I have found strength and patience to win—love?"

"And without your strength," she whispered, her face against his, "how should I have found courage to win through—hatred?"

They moved on—to another mound. For a moment it seemed that a corner of the curtain was lifted, so near was the gentle voice, so clear the words.

"Well done, Jerry boy—work—love—and some day you too will pass behind the curtain and find that love lives for ever."

On—through the haunted lane, past the witch's cottage, where a light burned behind the crimson blinds, and Margery's shadow moved across them. On—to the solemn snow-clad woods. Loneliness, peeping through the branches, fled with a lilting laugh—her place was gone.

Church Clock struck twelve. The two friendly faces watched them go. On the Moon's brilliant visage a little cloud rested.

"Church Clock, Church Clock," he cried, "will this, too, pass?" And Church Clock answered loud and clear—

"Nay, friend—true love never passes—only it grows deeper, stronger—till it joins the eternal blue." And the little cloud drifted from the shining face.

"Listen, dearest," said Jerry. "It seems as though the earth were rejoicing with us. There's music in the air—in the trees —everywhere."

And from deep glens, from moonlit glades, from sky and sea and woodland, came Pan's piping, and the song he sang that night was the song of life—of love—of work and happiness. Grave, solemn, yet with a tripping May-day measure, a lightsome airy dance for fairy feet. Listening, they knew it came from their own hearts—Nature but echoed it. He lifted her to him, clasping her close and long, and Church Clock struck the first hour of a new day.

THE END

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